



Routledge Studies in the Philosophy of Religion

PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAYS AGAINST OPEN THEISM

Edited by
Benjamin H. Arbour



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Philosophical Essays Against Open Theism

This new collection of philosophically rigorous essays critiques the interpretation of divine omniscience known as open theism, focusing primarily on philosophically motivated open theism and positing arguments that reject divine knowledge of future contingents in the face of the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge. The eleven new essays in this collection, written by some of the most renowned philosophers on the topic of divine providence, represent a philosophical attempt to seriously consider open theism. They cover a wide variety of issues, including: the ontology of time, systematic metaphysics, perfect being theology, the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, the problem of evil, and the nature of divine knowledge in general. *Philosophical Essays Against Open Theism* advances the discussion by wrestling against the assertions of open theism, and will be of interest to both proponents and opponents of this controversial issue.

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Edited by Benjamin H. Arbour

First published 2019
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-79999-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-75570-0 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

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Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to more people than I can possibly hope to remember. First and foremost, I wish to express gratitude to God for the opportunity to study philosophy and theology. It has always been my intent to do analytic theology in an effort to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, Jesus Christ. When others weren't sure whether or not this project would ever come to fruition, I am convinced that God, who I maintain enjoys exhaustive definite foreknowledge, knew that this anthology would be completed. I am grateful for divine grace in seeing this project through from its inception through the very final stages.

I also wish to thank Greg Welty, who first encouraged me to pursue further study of open theism after a directed study course at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Without his encouragement and tutelage, I have little confidence that a volume like this would have happened at all.

I'd also like to thank Kevin Timpe, whose patience I have tried beyond what any friend should ever have to endure. His poking and prodding played an important role in seeing this volume move through its final stages. Thanks are also due to his summer research student, Kaitlyn Eekhoff, who assisted with some of the formatting of a few chapters.

Thank you also to the editors at Routledge, who have been fantastic. Despite trying their seemingly endless patience, they've provided tremendous support in seeing this project to completion.

Finally, I'd like to thank several philosophers who've assisted me as my thinking developed about open theism. Philosophy is a strange world where your heroes become your friends. Numerous conversations over coffee and meals have contributed in one way or another to this volume. In no particular order, thanks are due to Alvin Plantinga, Eleonore Stump, Greg Ganssle, JR Gilhooly, Greg Trickett, Jay Howell, Jordan Wessling, and Joshua Rasmussen. Special thanks to William Hasker, Elijah Hess, Alan Rhoda, and Dean Zimmerman for ensuring that I have not misrepresented various openness positions.

Any properly Christian method for anything begins and ends with God, for the Lord is the Alpha and the Omega. Therefore, again, thanks be to God. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

Introduction

Benjamin H. Arbour

Imagine Abby, a bright undergraduate majoring in philosophy at a prestigious university. After completing a standard introductory philosophy course during her first semester as a fresher, Abby then took two survey courses, one in metaphysics and the other in epistemology. Following this, Abby felt she was ready to pursue more advanced topics in philosophy. So, during her sophomore year, she took an ethics class in the fall as well as a course in ancient philosophy; in the spring she studied logic and medieval philosophy.

In the beginning of her third year, Abby felt prepared for advanced electives, so she enrolled in a course surveying the philosophy of action while also taking modern philosophy. She learned about how different thinkers have understood decision-making and the nature of causation. Her professor covered a range of topics, including determinism, chaos theory, and the various ways philosophers have thought about the relationship between free will and moral responsibility.

In the spring, Abby was eager to find out whether her religious beliefs would stand up to the scrutiny of rigorous philosophical analysis. So she decides to take a course in the philosophy of religion taught by one of the world's leaders in the field, an individual who also happens to publish widely on the metaphysics of time, causation, and modality.

Having already been exposed to numerous philosophical debates, Abby finds the majority of the material in the class enjoyable, and she doesn't have any difficulty squaring many of her Christian beliefs with reasonable positions in analytic philosophy. However, the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge catches Abby by surprise. This particular philosophical puzzle ends up challenging Abby's long-held beliefs about divine knowledge.

Abby's theistic commitments coming into the course include the belief that God has exhaustive definite foreknowledge. She is committed to the idea that God not only knows what *could* happen in the future, but also what is actually *going* to happen. Abby is also committed to the idea that at least some of the actions of human beings aren't determined by God or anything else; rather, she maintains that humans possess free will, including the ability to help shape the future by choosing between multiple possibilities. But after being exposed to various constructions of the dilemma of freedom

and foreknowledge, Abby finds herself genuinely wondering how God could know whether or not she will, say, drink orange juice with her breakfast tomorrow if it is genuinely up to her to make the decision. Imagine the conversation Abby has with herself in her head.

"If God is infallible," she thinks, "then God cannot be wrong. So if God believes that I will drink orange juice tomorrow, then it must be the case that I will, in fact, drink orange juice tomorrow. But if God believes that I will drink orange juice tomorrow, and if God cannot be wrong, then how can I be free to refrain from drinking the orange juice? For if I were to refrain from drinking the orange juice, the present belief that God has would be wrong! Since nobody has the ability to bring it about that God is mistaken, it would therefore seem that I don't have the ability to refrain from drinking the orange juice tomorrow. And, without that ability, I'm not free."

The argument that has Abby so worked up is based on the idea that whatever lies in the past is no longer within our control, and therefore is no longer up to us in the same way that the future is up to us, which is known as temporal asymmetry. Temporal asymmetry, together with the assumption of a libertarian understanding of free will, entails that the past differs from the future in that, whatever happened in the past is no longer within our control, whereas whatever comes about in the future remains in some sense "up to us." Versions of the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge, including those that depend of temporal asymmetry, are plentiful, but a few stand out as very careful articulations of the problem. The most basic version runs as follows:

- (1) Because God is infallible, all divine knowledge is infallible.
- (2) God knows at t_1 that an agent S will freely do an action A at t_3 .
- (3) S is free to refrain from doing A at t_3 .¹

This puzzle appears to present us with a dilemma. If God infallibly knows that an agent S will freely do an action A at t_3 , then S does A at t_3 . But, assuming a libertarian conception of free will, an agent is free with respect to doing something only if that agent has the ability to do otherwise. Therefore, if S does A "freely" at t_3 , then S must have the ability to refrain from doing A at t_3 . But, if S has the ability to refrain from doing A at t_3 , then S has the ability to bring it about either that God knew something that is false (which is impossible, even for God), or that God knew something different than what we antecedently said God knew. But, assuming temporal asymmetry, no agent has the ability to change the past, and what God knew at t_1 is a part of the past once t_3 arrives. So, it seems that if God knows at t_1 that S will do A at t_3 , then S does not do A freely at t_3 . Alternatively, if S does enjoy the ability to do otherwise with respect to either doing A or refraining from doing A at t_3 , then God cannot know at t_1 whether or not S will do A at t_3 .

William Hasker offers a more thorough explanation of the predicament.

- (B1) It is now true that Clarence will have a cheese omelet for breakfast tomorrow. (Premise)
- (B2) It is impossible that God should at any time believe what is false, or fail to believe anything that is true. (Premise: divine omniscience)
- (B3) Therefore, God has always believed that Clarence will have a cheese omelet for breakfast tomorrow. (From 1,2)
- (B4) If God has always believed a certain thing, it is not in anyone's power to bring it about that God has not always believed that thing. (Premise: the unalterability of the past)
- (B5) Therefore, it is not in Clarence's power to bring it about that God has not always believed that he would have a cheese omelet for breakfast. (From 3,4)
- (B6) It is not possible for it to be true both that God has always believed that Clarence would have a cheese omelet for breakfast, and that he does not in fact have one. (From 2)
- (B7) Therefore, it is not in Clarence's power to refrain from having a cheese omelet for breakfast tomorrow. (From 5,6) So Clarence's eating the omelet tomorrow is not an act of free choice.²

Consider also Linda Zagzebski's statement of a different version of the foreknowledge dilemma.

The state of affairs

- (1) God's being infallible (or essentially omniscient)

and

- (2) God's believing at $t1$ that I will do S at $t3$

are jointly inconsistent with

- (3') The accidental contingency* of S at $t2$

and hence with

- (3) My being free to refrain from doing S at $t3$.³

Zagzebski's formulation of the dilemma rests on the notion of accidental necessity, which is closely related to temporal asymmetry. Medieval philosophers suggested that just because the past is no longer under our control does not mean that the events which are not fixed were always determined to obtain. Rather, whereas certain events were at one time indeterminate and therefore contingent, once they obtain, these events become necessary. But the type of necessity that affixes to the events of the fixed past isn't an essential necessity, but rather is an accidental necessity. This preserves the

common sense notion of the fixity of the past while blocking arguments for determinism.

In an effort to answer the vexing question of whether or not God knows which future contingents will obtain, Abby begins to research the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge. Initially, Abby finds herself overwhelmed by the volume of the literature on the subject. Abby researched several responses that purport to preserve exhaustive foreknowledge including divine timelessness, Ockhamism, Molinism, and Calvinism. Despite her belief that God is indeed timeless, she finds herself persuaded by philosophical arguments offered by open theists which suggest that timelessness doesn't help with the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge.⁴ She rejects Ockhamism because she worries that its application of counterfactual power over the past does away with the temporal asymmetry thesis—the idea that the past is fixed and cannot be changed, whereas the future is indeterminate.⁵ Abby wishes that Molinism worked, but she finds herself convinced that it doesn't really address the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge at all, and therefore fails to reconcile the two, but rather presupposes some unnamed solution to the puzzle.⁶ In fact, Abby thinks that Molinism is really just an elaborate story that reduces to divine determinism, and she doesn't think it preserves a genuine ability to do otherwise on the part of created beings.⁷ Given her commitment to robust freedom, she rejects Calvinism and continues to think it doesn't reconcile a libertarian conception of freedom and foreknowledge at all, but rather does away with genuine freedom altogether (here understood to entail the ability to do otherwise) in favor of hard determinism. Having surveyed all the options available, Abby thought for a while that she would have to punt to mystery by defending the doctrine of antinomy—that what appears to be a contradiction is really a paradox that can be resolved only in the divine economy. But because of her commitment to pursuing analytic explanations to philosophical puzzles, appeals to antinomy left her unsatisfied.

However, after reading an important article surveying the various responses,⁸ Abby realizes she isn't interested in most of what has been written about the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge. Rather, she is interested in a response known as open theism, which is being taken seriously by philosophers of religion in light of the relatively recent revival of interest in analytic metaphysics. So, with renewed interests, Abby sets out in search for defenses of classical theism and its traditional understandings of divine omniscience (which is thought to include knowledge of future contingents) against alternative definitions required by open theism. Abby finds herself wanting to somehow preserve the idea that God knows the future, but she's inclined to admit defeat if she cannot find some way to escape the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge without giving up free will.

Some of Abby's friends are concerned about her. Vexed by the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge, Abby finds herself flirting with the idea that God doesn't know the future. Some of Abby's philosophically inclined friends have pointed out to Abby that open theism also fails to reconcile freedom

and foreknowledge; rather, open theists simply deny that God enjoys exhaustive foreknowledge of which future contingents will actually obtain. Some of Abby's religiously minded friends suggest that she speak with a pastor to find out what theological grounds there are for affirming divine knowledge of the future. A different group of Abby's religious friends are encouraging her to give up on philosophy entirely, arguing that philosophy is at fault for corrupting her conception of the divine. Still others friends have suggested that she refocus her attention by spending more time studying Scripture without giving up on her philosophical quest for wisdom and understanding.

Open Theism: Proponents and Critics

These days, Abby's story is far from uncommon. Since open theism began to attract attention nearly fifty years ago, theologians and philosophers have produced a significant amount of literature on the subject. Typically, theologians have paid very little attention to the philosophical matters, and philosophers have returned the favor by doing an equally poor job of paying attention to the theological matters. Therefore, virtually none of the extant literature focuses on open theism by paying attention to the overlap of philosophy and theology. Instead, theologians tend to interact principally with special revelation, whereas the majority of philosophers who have written on open theology have, to date, largely ignored the questions about Scripture and exegesis. From a theological perspective, those who defend open theism include Terrence Fretheim, Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, and John Sanders.⁹ Philosophically motivated open theists include David Basinger, William Hasker, Alan Rhoda, Richard Swinburne, Dale Tuggy, Peter van Inwagen, and Dean Zimmerman.¹⁰ Greg Boyd is one of the few who is as interested in the theology as he is the philosophy.¹¹

Interestingly, throughout the entire history of western civilization, adherents of all three Abrahamic faiths have consistently confessed that God knows the future. The witness to such understandings of omniscience have been particularly strong from Christianity. Faithful Christians across both east and west, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant, have maintained that God enjoys exhaustive knowledge of the future, including which of various future contingents will obtain. However, although many have thought that Anselmian perfect being theology requires such an understanding of the scope of divine knowledge, many open theists insist that openness alternatives to classical conceptions of omniscience need not impugn Anselmian conceptions of the divine nature.¹² The overwhelming majority of the extant responses to open theism means focusing on predominantly theological literature rather than philosophical in nature. Sadly, although much ink has been spilt in responding to open theism, very little of what critics have offered involves substantial philosophical reflection on the complex metaphysical issues involved in contemporary debates about the relationship between free will, causation, and divine omniscience.

Acknowledging such a lacuna in scholarship is not meant by any means to suggest that the theologically focused work put forward by evangelical opponents of open theism fails to meaningfully contribute to the discussions. On the contrary, Christians will do well to read the work of Millard Erickson, John Frame, Norman Geisler, John Piper, Steven Roy, James Spiegel, Bruce Ware, and others, even if one disagrees with the Calvinistic and/or Thomistic theologies of divine providence that they advocate.¹³ For anyone wanting to understand how conservative Christian theologians critique open theism, one needn't look very hard to find books full of such criticism. But people like Abby won't find these types of books particularly helpful since their authors don't engage the relevant philosophical issues about the nature of time, causation, and the metaphysics of modality in a serious way. So, debates among theologians about open theism seem to have come to an impasse with very little progress being made on this front in the last ten years.¹⁴

However, philosophical critiques of open theism are far more difficult to find.¹⁵ This is especially tragic since the advances made on behalf of open theism have taken place on the philosophical side of things than in theology. That is, the majority of those who are advancing openness theology do so by appealing to philosophical and metaphysical motivations for their relatively novel conception of divine omniscience. Furthermore, of the critiques that have already been put forward, open theistic responses have come in fits and starts, and yet open theists continue to advance their innovative understandings of divine omniscience as though such a view is without any serious philosophical objections.

Hence, there is need for a project in this area. Because opponents of open theism have yet to offer comprehensive philosophical critiques of open theism, we are seeking to fill that lacuna. Furthermore, whereas other responses to open theism have focused principally on theological matters, the essays in this volume focus primarily on philosophical issues, although some of these issues have important implications for various theological doctrines. Accordingly, the contributing authors frequently make use of many areas of contemporary analytic philosophy in arguing against openness theology, because it seems to us that analytic theology as a methodology has the best potential to adjudicate in the debates over the extent of divine knowledge. We employ such methodologies in an effort to forestall approaches that yield little more than debates about whose exegesis of various passages of Scripture is superior.

A robust analytic theology of divine omniscience that is consistent with what has historically been considered an orthodox doctrine of God requires an understanding of numerous areas in both philosophy and theology—especially is such is thought to also account for what omniscience entails for the debates about the extent of God's knowledge of the future (including future contingents). Accordingly, in critiquing openness theology in all of its contemporary expressions, we appeal to contemporary analytic work in various areas of metaphysics, including causation, modality, ontology, and time,

as well as issues in philosophy of language, studies concerning the nature of truth, and action theory (especially free will and moral responsibility), not to mention aspects of the history of philosophy and theology that pertain to the Christian tradition and classical expressions of theology proper and divine omniscience.

Species of Open Theism

Accurately understanding open theism requires that we provide a thorough taxonomy of various accounts of open theism. There is no singular, monolithic view which *is* open theism; rather there are a variety of open theisms. The most natural divide among versions of open theism separates theologically motivated accounts of open theism from philosophically driven versions of open theism. Because the essays in this volume are focused on philosophy more so than theology, we will set theologically motivated open theism to one side for the time being. Even with this division in place, there are at least three distinct types of philosophically driven open theism, and arguments against one version may or may not hold any water when considering some other type.

What unites all open theists is the affirmation that the future is *epistemically open* for God, which entails the denial that God does possess *exhaustive definite foreknowledge*. Epistemic openness is defined by Alan Rhoda:

The future is *epistemically open* at time t if and only if for some state of affairs X and some future time t^* neither $\langle X \text{ will obtain at } t^* \rangle$ nor $\langle X \text{ will not obtain at } t^* \rangle$ (nor their tense-neutral counterparts) is infallibly known either (i) at t or (ii) timelessly.¹⁶

The future can be epistemically open even if God infallibly knows certain aspects of the future; what is important to open theists as regards epistemic openness is that God's knowledge of the future is not *exhaustive*. Moreover, on nearly all of the leading versions of open theism, God has perfect knowledge of the entire realm of *possibilia*, and therefore knows exhaustively about what might (or might not) happen. God might enjoy foreknowledge of some future events, given that those future events are now determined and therefore no longer contingent. But, according to open theists, it is not the case that God's knowledge of the future is *exhaustive*, for God does not have knowledge of the future. That is to say, assuming indeterminism, God lacks knowledge concerning whichever actual future state of affairs is going to obtain.

Furthermore, open theists deny that God's knowledge of the future is *definite*, although they differ among themselves as to whether or not the future itself is definite. To be clear, according to all open theists, for whatever elements of the future are presently contingent, God lacks knowledge of which of those possible states of affairs is going to actually obtain, and therefore

God's foreknowledge isn't *definite*.¹⁷ Open theists differ about whether God has beliefs about whether some state of affairs is going to obtain. Several of the theologically motivated open theists have argued that passages in Scripture which show that God is surprised when things don't turn out the way God expected serve as excellent proof texts in favor of open theism.¹⁸ Of course, this interpretation suggests that God has beliefs about what is going to happen, but notice that on this analysis, it seems that some of God's beliefs turn out to be incorrect.¹⁹ Others, notably Peter Geach, argue that the metaphysics of prevention allow for God to know at one moment that the plane is going to crash, but at some later moment God knows that the plane isn't going to crash because the pilot prevented the crash.²⁰ All this to say, whatever type of beliefs God may have about future contingents, given that what might happen in the future isn't settled, God's knowledge of the future cannot be said to be definite. Much of the debate on these matters hinges on how one understands the semantic content of tensed language with respect to modality in propositions concerning the future, which we discuss briefly later.

Versions of open theism can be further divided into sub-categories based on how advocates of varieties of open theism respond to key questions concerning the status of propositions concerning future contingents (hereafter PCFC). Alan Rhoda helps clarify the nature of the debate by introducing another technical term, namely, *alethic openness*.

The future is alethically open at time t if and only if for some state of affairs X and some future time t^* (i) neither $\langle X \text{ will obtain at } t^* \rangle$ nor $\langle X \text{ will not obtain at } t^* \rangle$ is true at t and (ii) neither of their tense-neutral counterparts, $\langle X \text{ does obtain at } t^* \rangle$ and $\langle X \text{ does not obtain at } t^* \rangle$, is true *simpliciter*.²¹

One simple way to differentiate types of open theism involves how open theists understand the application of the principle of bivalence to PCFC. Some open theists deny that bivalence applies to PCFC. Instead, they prefer either probabilistic or multivalent approaches to the truth-values of PCFC; among these thinkers are J.R. Lucas, Richard Purtill, Dale Tuggy, and Dean Zimmerman.²² However, this is not the majority opinion among open theists. Most open theists affirm that bivalence does apply to PCFC.

There are still further sub-divisions of open theism, even among open theists who affirm that the principle of bivalence does, indeed, apply to PCFC. Such differentiations stem from how an open theist answers this question: are any of the PCFC that have bivalent truth-values actually *true*? Hasker, Swinburne, and van Inwagen affirm that at least some PCFC are true, and their position requires the affirmation that there are some truths that are unknown by God. So understood, divine foreknowledge is *limited* in that it isn't exhaustive of all future truths, and has therefore been called limited foreknowledge open theism (hereafter LFOT). Part of what motivates advocates of LFOT is the belief that truth is omnitemporal. That is, defenders of

LFOT deny that propositions ever change their truth-value, and they maintain that the omnitemporality of truth applies to PCFC just as it does to other propositions. These thinkers maintain that divine omniscience does not entail knowledge of all truths. Rather, they offer modal reformulations of omniscience such that God knows all truths that are logically knowable. Armed with modal reformulations of the definition of omniscience, advocates of LFOT deny that the existence of truths are unknown by God poses any problem for divine omniscience because knowledge of such truths is logically impossible, even for metaphysically perfect beings.

Other open theists take modal reformulations of divine omniscience to be problematic. However, an open theist need not deny that the principle of bivalence apply to PCFC in order to avoid LFOT. Open theists that are averse to the existence of any truths unknown by an omniscient God have defended alternatives to LFOT known as open future open theism (hereafter OFOT). OFOT differs from LFOT in that the former can affirm that God knows all truths, a maneuver made possible by rejecting the omnitemporality of truth.

OFOT comes in at least two varieties. Defenders of each version of OFOT affirm that divine omniscience entails knowledge of all truths, so they stand against LFOT's redefining omniscience in modal terms.²³ However, advocates of OFOT affirm that God enjoys knowledge of all truths for different reasons. According to what we regard to be the most promising version of open theism, all PCFC involving "will" or "will not" language are false. This position, which is sometimes called 'all-falsism,' is thought to preserve the principle of bivalence for PCFC.²⁴ All-falsism relies on a Peircean interpretation of PCFC as opposed to the interpretation of PCFC offered by Ockhamists. Alan Rhoda summarizes this debate nicely.

According to Ockhamism, the truth value of a proposition about the future depends solely on what is the case at the future time (implicitly) referred to in the proposition. Thus, the truth of "The coin will land heads at L" depends solely on what is the case at L. If, when L arrives, the coin has landed heads, then the proposition has always been true. Since we are supposing that the coin did land heads at L, it therefore has always been true that the coin was going to land heads at L. At all times prior to L, the future was alethically settled in that respect. Generalizing, it follows from Ockhamism that *any* proposition about a future contingent has either always been true or has always been false. The future has always been alethically settled in all respects.

In contrast, the Peircean proposes that whether a proposition about the future is true *at a given time* depends on whether sufficient conditions for its truth obtain at that time. Thus, "The coin will land heads at L" is true *at F*, says the Peircean, only if sufficient conditions obtain *at F* for the coin's landing heads at L. Likewise, "The coin will *not* land heads at L" is true *at F* just in case sufficient conditions obtain at F for the coin's *not* landing heads at L. In general, then, *no* 'will' or 'will not'

propositions about future contingents are true because sufficient conditions for their obtaining are not yet in place.²⁵

All-falsism, together with the denial of the omnitemporality of truth, means that PCFC involving “will” and “will not” language shouldn’t be interpreted as contradictories (as the Ockhamist asserts), but rather as contraries. Peirceans interpret both “will” and “will not” as modal operators. According to Peirceans, “will” should be read as, “*in all causally possible open futures*,” whereas “will not” should be read as “*in no causally possible open futures*.” The Peircean understanding of the semantics of “will” and “will not” is depicted in the diagram immediately below.

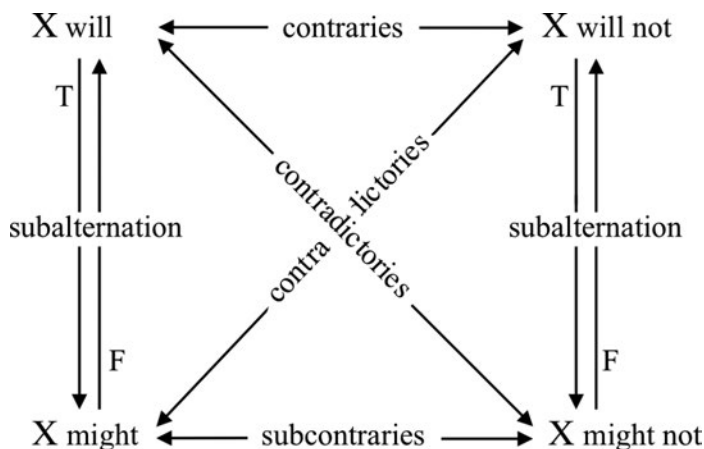


Figure 0.1

Alan Rhoda and Patrick Todd are the leading defenders of this version of OFOT, but Rhoda and Todd defend all-falsism for different reasons that involve highly nuanced understandings of the relationship between issues in philosophy of language and presentism as the metaphysics of time, all as these matters pertain to the semantic content of PCFC. Besides this all-falsism approach, there is yet another version of OFOT.

Richard Purtill, Dale Tuggy, and Dean Zimmerman each affirm open futurism, but they all deny that the principle of bivalence applies to PCFC.²⁶ They find the affirmation of Peircean semantics a price too high to pay and prefer instead to reject bivalentism. Of course, such a position entails the rejection of classical logic and requires that Purtill, Tuggy, and Zimmerman adopt a multivalent logic, such as that formalized by Jan Łukasiewicz. In both its bivalent and non-bivalent forms, OFOT denies that God possesses any foreknowledge of future contingents whatsoever, but it can do so without having to affirm the existence of truths unknown by God.

What Is to Come: A Description of the Chapters

The essays in this volume as a whole engage with all of the philosophical versions of open theism described in the previous section. However, some essays contain arguments that undermine one or more versions of open theism without serving as knock down arguments against all versions of open theism, or of open theism simpliciter. Regardless, we sincerely hope that these essays advance the discussion by pushing back against a novel interpretation of divine omniscience, especially since this concerns a perennial philosophical puzzle. The chapters are divided up into three sections. The first section includes essays about open theism and the metaphysics of time. The essays in the second section cover other philosophical issues as they pertain to open theism. The chapters in the third section address open theism from the standpoint of other concerns in philosophical theology.

The first section begins with a chapter by Eleonore Stump, who argues against limited foreknowledge versions of open theism. Building on her previous work, Stump argues that divine eternity, properly understood, entails divine timelessness. She goes on to argue that divine timelessness is able to preserve a robust understanding freedom, indeed, a libertarian conception of freedom. After paying particularly close attention to the claims of William Hasker, Stump concludes that traditional construals of divine timelessness provide adequate resources to the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge, thereby rendering open theism unnecessary.

Sandra Visser responds to the alleged incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and free will in light of metaphysical presentism. The most reasonable motivation to be an open theist, she argues, arises out of a deep conviction that anything deserving to be called free will is incompatible with both causal determinism and divine (fore)knowledge. Such a strong incompatibilism is also typically accompanied by (and usually entails) presentism. These philosophers, some of whom are also Christians, are thus pushed to open theism. Many of them take great pains to show how their open theism doesn't take them all that far from orthodoxy. In the end, though, Visser argues that open theists deny providence, sovereignty, and a robust omniscience. In her chapter, she shows that arguments that treat causal determinism and divine knowledge in the same way are mistaken. She concludes by examining how it might be possible that God know the future, even if it is not real.

The philosophy of time section concludes with an essay by Benjamin Arbour, who brings modal metaphysics into conversation with open theists' understanding of the philosophy of time. Building on the work of philosophers who note that the nature of time is contingent, Arbour suggests that open theists are mistaken to make time such a fundamental aspect of systematic metaphysics. He continues by showing that open theists who favor open futurism are advocating for a wholesale revisioning of modal metaphysics and possible world theory in general. Arbour concludes by demonstrating that, if open futurists are able to avoid these troubles, the principle of the

fixity of the past doesn't preclude a possible world's version of Ockhamism, which is compatible with both the main tenants of open futurism and exhaustive divine foreknowledge.

The second section covers an array of other philosophical issues and their relation to open theism. David Alexander opens the section with a chapter about origins essentialism. Alexander suggests that origins essentialism (OE) conflicts with most versions of open theism, which endorses the Asymmetry Thesis. According to Jonathan Kvanvig:

“[T]he Asymmetry Thesis” [is] the thesis that the part of the future that is determined by present and past events is secure in truth value and falls within the scope of omniscience whereas the parts of the future that remain undetermined by the present and past do not fall within the scope of omniscience and perhaps are not secure in truth value.

So the future has two parts, one knowable and the other unknowable. Like Kvanvig, Alexander argues that the Asymmetry Thesis is false. More precisely, he argues that the Asymmetry Thesis is false given that the following thesis is true:

Strong Origins Essentialism (SOE): For any event E, the causal ancestry of E is essential to the identity of E.

According to SOE the occurrence of some event E logically implies all of the events in E's causal ancestry. But some free actions are in E's causal ancestry. Hence the occurrence of E logically implies some free actions. Now if E is future and E falls within the scope of the things that God knows, then God will also know the free actions that are part of E's causal ancestry. But Alexander observes that surely some of those free actions are also in the future. Hence in order to know E, God must know some future free actions. But this is incompatible with every version of open theism. Hence, Alexander demonstrates that either open theism is false, or that SOE is false, or that God can know E without knowing everything in E's causal ancestry. After arguing against the latter two options, Alexander concludes that open theism is false.

Paul Helm continues the section with a chapter on compatibilist understandings of freedom. In discussing the nature of openness, Helm reasons that openness is obviously a state that can be enjoyed in various degrees. Helm discusses the typical openness position which rests on indeterminacy. He goes on to discuss the flimsiness of the openness position, together with the theological costs involved in adopting any openness position. Helm suggests that compatibilism, properly understood, entails a degree of openness, and not merely a purely epistemic openness, but also an ontic degree of openness as well. This, Helm suggests, should satisfy all who desire their theology to be 'open.'

Katherin Rogers contributes next, and hers is a chapter on Anselmian conceptions of free will. She notes that all open theists insist that freedom entails open options. If God knows what you will choose tomorrow, you cannot choose other than God foreknows, and are not free, or so the open theist argues. Building on her work on Anselm of Canterbury, Rogers suggests that the foundational criterion of freedom is aseity—that your choice is from yourself. This inspires the “Grounding Principle”: only an actual choice can ground the truth of propositions about the choice and be the source of knowledge of the choice. Aseity requires that a created agent choose, absolutely on his own, between open options. True, God knows what you will choose tomorrow, but Rogers insists that this is only because you choose it. She continues that, according to open theists, even divine foreknowledge caused by your own choice conflicts with robust *enough* alternatives. But it is unreasonable to jettison divine foreknowledge in order to preserve alternatives which play no role at all in enhancing freedom of the sort that can support moral responsibility.

The final chapter in the philosophical issues section comes from Robert Stewart. Assuming open theism for the purpose of reduction, he argues that either God has some false beliefs, or it is possible for us to have propositional knowledge of something that God does not know. If Stewart is correct on either point, then, on open theism, God is not properly omniscient. To show this, Stewart claims to know that his wife will love him tomorrow. He notes that such propositions concern the exact the sort of knowledge of the future that open theists typically insist God cannot have—knowledge of a future free human choice. But, if one can know that his wife will love him tomorrow, all hope seems lost for open theism.

The third and final section of the book takes up concerns against open theism raised by other areas of philosophical theology. James Anderson offers the first chapter, arguing that open theism fails to provide adequate resources to account for an important kind of prayer. Anderson maintains that there is nothing unintelligible in principle about past-directed prayers, provided that certain situational conditions are met. He further argues that while Thomism, Calvinism, and Molinism can allow for such prayers, open theism cannot—at least, not without betraying some of its foundational tenets. Consequently, Anderson notes that any evidence for the intelligibility and efficacy of past-directed prayers constitutes evidence against open theism. He concludes by offering two distinct lines of evidence for the intelligibility and efficacy of past-directed prayers, thereby undermining the viability of open theism.

The philosophical theology section contains two essays on the problem of evil. The first of these comes from Greg Welty, who suggests that when considering the problem of evil, open theists seem pulled in two different directions, depending on which theological criterion is prioritized: divine risk, or divine control. Open theistic strategies on the problem of evil either move in a ‘more risk’ direction (thereby emphasizing divine non-culpability)

or in a 'less risk' direction (thereby emphasizing divine responsibility and control). Welty argues that moving in the former direction makes God more irresponsible, and actually increases divine culpability. (In addition the burden of the risk seems to fall on creatures rather than on God.) But moving in the 'less risk' direction involves the open theist in appealing to 'greater good' and/or 'skeptical theist' strategies, in which case there is no *distinctive* open theist theodicy (since such strategies are available to non-open-theists as well.) In fact, if some combination of 'greater good' and 'skeptical theist' responses can neutralize the problem of evil, without recourse to any open theist distinctives, then a Christian (all else being equal) should prefer a stronger rather than weaker doctrine of divine providence. Thus, contrary to some recent writing, Welty concludes that open theism doesn't seem to give the theodocist an edge on the problem of evil.

The second essay on the problem of evil comes from Kenneth Perszyk, who takes up soteriological concerns in the face of open theism. He aims to continue comparative assessment of divine providence by considering the soteriological problem(s) of evil. After briefly describing the core components of the Molinist and open theistic accounts of providence, Perszyk distinguishes different soteriological problems of evil and considers what Molinists and open theists can say about them. He argues that open theism does not fare better than Molinism in solving these problems, and that Molinism may in fact be a benefit, especially for those attracted to universalism.

Keith Wyma rounds out not only the section on philosophical theology, but also the entire volume, with a chapter discussing Christian conceptions of atonement. Wyma begins by noting Greg Boyd's arguments that open theism helps address the problem of evil by making God more trustworthy to struggling believers. Believers in the midst of suffering often don't ask whether there *is* a God (the standard problem of evil). Rather, theists find themselves asking whether they can *trust* God, or whether God is *just*. Does God really care about them, or is God really working for their good? Call this the *pastoral* problem of evil. Greg Boyd contends that open theism helps believers positively answer these questions, because the fact of God's merely probabilistic knowledge of our future, free actions allows believers to see that God didn't put them in situations—like, say, a marriage that has ended in divorce—while either intending or even definitely knowing that the situations would turn out like that. Open theism supposedly lets God off the hook in a way that more completist views of God's foreknowledge and providence can't.

However, Wyma argues that open theism has just the opposite effect on the pastoral problem. First, considering that who exists in the world is very much influenced by human free choices—who decides to marry (or at least have sex with) whom—it's clear that when Jesus died on the cross, neither He *nor even the Father* could have known for whom he was dying, let alone for what sins freely committed by those salvation-recipients. In short, Jesus didn't die for *your* (or *my*) sins, but only to write a blank check for all possible

humanity. Unfortunately, the notion of Jesus' making a grand sacrifice for the mass of abstract humanity in its abstract sinfulness doesn't address at all the question of how much he loves you (or me) as real individuals, sinful in concrete, ugly and nasty ways. Part of the pastoral problem is believers' struggle over whether God can love *them*, in all of their particular guilt and shame. If the cross is where God definitively proves his love for us, open theism's characterization of atonement significantly undercuts how much individual believers can infer from that. Second, open theism creates a dilemma about situations, like the one above, that might cause a believer to question trust in God. On the one horn, to whatever extent God really doesn't know the situational outcomes, God becomes *less* trustworthy. God may be more obviously guiltless regarding bad outcomes, but that very lack of knowledge makes God a less capable object of our trust *as God*, as our guide and shepherd through life. On the other horn, to whatever extent God's omniscience over the future-probabilities is more definite—which would make God a more capable object of our trust about our future—open theism runs into the same pastoral problems more traditional accounts of God's foreknowledge do. Thus, one of Boyd's principal supports for open theism—namely, its assistance with the pastoral problem of evil—fails.

Notes

1. For those unfamiliar with the demarcations, the prefix "*t*" denotes time, and the numeric markers denote chronological progression such that *t1* is prior to *t2* which is prior to *t3*, and so on. We skip *t2* in the argument so as to allow for the possibility of times in between *t1* and *t3*—that is, although *t3* is after *t1*, it is not immediately subsequent to *t1*. Some philosophers utilize time markers such as these where *t2* denotes the present. In this essay, I follow the most contemporary literature in denoting the present with *t_a*.
2. William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 69.
3. Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 31.
4. Cf. Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 144–205; Alan R. Rhoda, "Foreknowledge and Fatalism: Why Divine Timelessness Doesn't Help," in *Debates in the Metaphysics of Time*, ed. L. Nathan Oaklander (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 253–274; and Peter van Inwagen, "What Does an Omniscient Being Know?" in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 1, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 216–230.
5. Cf. Alvin Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out," *Faith and Philosophy* 3, no. 3 (1986): 235–269.
6. Cf. John Martin Fischer, "Putting Molinism in Its Place," in *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate*, ed. Ken Perszyk (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 208–226.
7. Recent exchanges concerning Molinism have been collected in Ken Perszyk, ed. *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012). See also Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*, Cornell Studies in Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006). Philosophers have argued that Molinists cannot endorse Peter

- van Inwagen's consequent argument, which is crucial for preserving libertarian understandings of freedom and responsibility. Cf. Ken Perszyk, "Molinism and the Consequence Argument," *Faith and Philosophy* 20, no. 2 (2003): 131–151; and Yishai Cohen, "Molinists Cannot Endorse the Consequence Argument," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 77, no. 3 (2015): 231–246.
8. John Martin Fischer, Patrick Todd, and Neal Tognazzini, "Engaging With Pike: God, Freedom, and Time," *Philosophical Papers* 38, no. 2 (July 2009): 247–270.
 9. Terrence Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984); Thomas Jay Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015); Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001); Richard Rice, *God's Foreknowledge & Man's Free Will* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1985); and John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence*, Revised ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).
 10. David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996); Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*; Alan Rhoda, "The Fivefold Openness of the Future," in *God in an Open Universe: Science, Metaphysics, and Open Theism*, eds. William Hasker, Thomas Jay Oord, and Dean Zimmerman (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 69–93; idem., "Generic Open Theism and Some Varieties Thereof," *Religious Studies* 44 (2008): 225–234; idem., "The Philosophical Case for Open Theism," *Philosophia* 35 (2007): 301–311; Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994); idem., *The Coherence of Theism*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993); Dale Tuggy, "Three Roads to Open Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (January 2007): 28–51; Peter van Inwagen, "What Does an Omniscient Being Know?" *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* 1 (2008): 216–230; and Dean Zimmerman, "The A-Theory of Time, Presentism, and Open Theism," in *Science and Religion in Dialogue*, ed. Melville Stewart (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 791–809.
 11. Consider Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000). There are certainly other open theists who are just as deeply concerned about Scripture as they are about the metaphysical and philosophical issues involved in these debates, but few publications demonstrate this concern in the content of what has been written. One significant exception stands out: David Basinger et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
 12. See, for instance, Yujin Nagasawa, "A New Defence of Anselmian Theism," *Philosophical Quarterly* 58 (2008): 577–596; and also his "Divine Omniscience and Knowledge De Se," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 53 (2003): 73–82.
 13. Millard Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?: The Current Controversy Over Divine Foreknowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003); John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001); Norman L. Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man?: The New "Open" View of God—Neotheism's Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1997); Paul Kjos Helseth, John Piper, and Justin Taylor, eds., *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003); Steven C. Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow?: A Comprehensive Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); James S. Spiegel, *The Benefits of Providence: A New Look at Divine Sovereignty* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005); Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000). Consider also two anthologies on the subject of open theism: Douglas S.

- Huffman and Eric L. Johnson, eds., *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002); and Douglas Wilson, ed., *Bound Only Once: The Failure of Open Theism* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2001).
14. Some debates over the extent of divine foreknowledge take shape principally by way of appeal to Scripture, but these debates often reduce to something like, “My exegesis is superior to other interpretations,” and fail to account for the role that various philosophical presuppositions have in shaping the way different people interpret Scripture. See Benjamin H. Arbour and Douglas K. Blount, “The Camel’s Nose: Open Theism and Biblical Interpretation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171, no. 683 (2014): 274–288.
 15. Four journal articles constitute the bulk of academic philosophical work that has been put forward against openness theology. Cf. William Lane Craig and David Hunt, “The Perils of the Open Road,” *Faith and Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (January 2013): 49–71; Alexander Pruss, “From Restricted to Full Omniscience,” *Religious Studies* 47, no. 2 (June 2011): 257–264; Katherin Rogers, “The Necessity of the Present and Anselm’s Eternalist Response to the Problem of Theological Fatalism,” *Religious Studies* 43, no. 1 (March 2007): 25–47; and Michael Rota, “A Problem for Hasker: Freedom With Respect to the Present, Hard Facts, and Theological Incompatibilism,” *Faith and Philosophy* 27, no. 3 (July 2010): 287–305. Cf. Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 65–83.
- Finally, consider also two volumes that contain point-counterpoint exchanges between defenders of differing perspectives. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); and David Basinger and Randall Basinger, *Predestination and Freewill: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty & Human Freedom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986).
16. Rhoda, “Fivefold Openness,” 75.
 17. The debate about the definiteness of divine foreknowledge is actually more complicated than this, especially in light of Geachianism (more on this below). Furthermore, because of the way that conversational implicatures function when one invokes a phrase such as “is going to,” which is logically and semantically equivalent to “will,” or “determined to arise,” the philosophy of language gets tricky when we attempt to analyze claims about divine knowledge of propositions concerning future contingents, so we will won’t dwell on these matters. Suffice it to say, whatever future comes about (assuming that some future moment obtains, giving rise to the state of affairs that represents such a future moment), on open theism, God doesn’t know, and cannot infallibly predict, what that state of affairs will be.
 18. Greg Boyd and John Sanders appeal to biblical passages that seem to indicated God is surprised as proof texts for open theism. Cf. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 59–62; and Sanders, *The God Who Risks*.
 19. See Robert Stewart’s chapter in this volume for an extended discussion of this important issue.
 20. For a careful summary and analysis of Geach’s views on divine omniscience and providence, see Patrick Todd, “Geachianism,” in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 3, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 222–251. Scholars debate about whether or not Geachianism counts as open theism, and this debate is rather tricky, for, on the one hand, Geachians affirm that God knows what is going to happen in the future, but, on the other hand, they deny that what God knows is definite. The modality of future contingents plays an important role in leading to the use of “exhaustive definite foreknowledge” as a very precise, technical term.
 21. Rhoda, “Fivefold Openness,” 74.

22. J.R. Lucas, *The Future: An Essay on God, Temporality, and Truth* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Richard L. Purtill, "Fatalism and the Omnitemporality of Truth," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 185–192; Dale Tuggy, "Three Roads to Open Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (January 2007): 28–51; and Zimmerman, "The A-Theory of Time, Presentism, and Open Theism," 791–809.
23. But note that for those who affirm divine knowledge of all truths, it is vacuously true that God knows all that it is logically possible to know.
24. All-falsism builds on the work of A.N. Prior. Cf. *Papers on Time and Tense*, eds. Per Hasle et al. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003).
25. Rhoda, "The Philosophical Case for Open Theism," 306. For an extended discussion of this topic, see pp 306–311, as well as Rhoda, "Fivefold Openness," 85–86; and the entirety of Alan R. Rhoda, Gregory A. Boyd, and Thomas G. Belt, "Open Theism, Omniscience, and the Nature of the Future," *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (2006): 432–459.
26. Craig Bourne offers an interesting analysis of the metaphysics of time, together with the rejection of bivalentism, that Purtill, Tuggy, and Zimmerman all favor. Cf. Bourne, *A Future for Presentism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Part I

Open Theism and the Metaphysics of Time

1 The Openness of God

Eternity and Free Will

Eleonore Stump

In various publications, William Hasker has argued for what he calls “the openness of God.” It is part of the openness of God, in Hasker’s view, that God does not have comprehensive knowledge of the future; in particular, the God of open theism lacks knowledge of the future free choices of human beings. The proponents of open theism, Hasker says,

portray God ‘as majestic yet intimate, as powerful yet gentle and responsive, as holy and loving and caring, as desiring for humans to decide freely for or against his will for them, yet endlessly resourceful in achieving his ultimate purposes.’¹

For Hasker, the openness of God means that although

God knows an immense amount about each one of us . . . he does not, because he cannot, plan his actions toward us on the basis of a prior knowledge of how we will respond. . . . And this means that God is a risk-taker; in expressing his love toward us, he opens himself up to the real possibility of failure.²

Hasker sees his position as an alternative to classical theism, as represented, for example, by standard Thomism, which Hasker rejects. There are two main reasons for his rejection. First, as he sees it, the Thomistic God cannot be intimate with human beings or responsive to them.³ Second, Hasker thinks that the Thomistic account of God as timeless solves the problem of foreknowledge and free will only at the cost of making God’s timeless knowledge useless to God in interaction with the temporal world.⁴ Hasker says,

I . . . regard the doctrine of timelessness as coherent and intelligible. . . . But divine timelessness . . . does not help . . . in enabling us to understand God’s actions in providence and prophecy.⁵

In this paper, I want to examine the second of Hasker’s reasons for rejecting classical theism.⁶ I will examine Hasker’s argument for thinking free

will and timeless knowledge are compatible, and I will give reasons for thinking that this argument is itself incompatible with the doctrine of eternity. Then I will try to show that considerations derived from the doctrine of eternity yield a more effective way to argue for the same conclusion. Finally, I will use those same considerations to try to undercut Hasker's conclusion that timeless knowledge could be of no use to God in guiding his actions in time.

Eternity

For Aquinas, God is not so much timeless as eternal; and because the doctrine of God's eternity makes a significant difference to these issues, it is important to try to be clear about it at the outset.

Boethius, who gives the classical definition of eternity, says that eternity is "the complete possession all at once of illimitable life."⁷ This is a timeless mode of existence. Nonetheless, nothing in this concept denies the reality of time or implies that temporal experiences or events are illusory.

If there were such a thing as Flatland, then there would be more than one mode of spatial existence. There would be both the Flatland mode of spatial existence and the three-dimensional mode of spatial existence. That sentient creatures such as human beings are three-dimensional would not mean that sentient creatures in Flatland were really somehow three-dimensional or that their mode of spatial existence somehow really had any of the three-dimensional characteristic of the three-dimensional mode of existence. The two spatial modes of existence, that of Flatland and that of three-dimensional human beings, would both be real; and neither would be reducible to the other or to any third thing. Nonetheless, the two worlds might interact. (In Erwin Abbott's original *Flatland*, a sentient square in Flatland comes into conversation with an inhabitant of a three-dimensional world, who has a terrible time explaining his three-dimensional world to his new friend, the square.)

Boethius and others who accept the concept of eternity suppose that an analogous point holds as regards modes of duration. From their point of view, reality includes both time and eternity as two distinct modes of duration, neither of which is reducible to the other or to any third thing. Nonetheless, it is possible for inhabitants of the differing modes to interact.

To understand the nature of the interactions, it is important to see that, as Boethius and many others in the traditions of the major monotheisms understand it, eternity is not just timelessness. Rather it is a mode of existence characterized by both the absence of succession and also limitless duration.

Temporal events are ordered in terms of the A-series—past, present, and future—and the B-series—earlier than, simultaneous with, later than. Because an eternal God cannot be characterized by succession, nothing in God's life can be ordered in either of those series. Moreover, no temporal entity or event can be past or future with respect to, or earlier or later than, the whole life

of an eternal God, because otherwise God would himself be part of a temporal series.

On the other hand, eternity is also characterized by limitless duration, that is, the duration of a present that is not limited by either future or past. Because the mode of existence of an eternal God is characterized by this kind of presentness, the relation between an eternal God and anything in time has to be one of simultaneity.

Of course, the presentness and simultaneity associated with an eternal God cannot be temporal presentness or temporal simultaneity. Taking the concept of eternity seriously involves recognizing that it introduces technical senses for several familiar words, including 'now,' 'present,' and 'simultaneous with,' as well as for the present-tense forms of many verbs. The relations between eternity and time therefore require a special sense of 'simultaneity.'

In earlier work, Norman Kretzmann and I called this special sort of simultaneity 'ET-simultaneity,' for 'simultaneity between what is eternal and what is temporal.' A relationship that can be recognized as a kind of simultaneity will of course be symmetric. But, since its relata have relevantly distinct modes of existence, ET-simultaneity will be neither reflexive nor transitive. In particular, each of two temporal events can be ET-simultaneous with one and the same eternal event without being ET-simultaneous with each other.

Given the doctrine of eternity, God does not have foreknowledge. He knows any given future contingent only as it is temporally present, and not as it is future. For the same reasons, God cannot change the past or act on the future. Such actions require a temporal location, without which there can be neither past nor future. Nonetheless, the proponents of the doctrine of eternity thought that, in the eternal present, God can directly affect events that are past or future with respect to us. God can will in the eternal present that something occur or come into existence at any particular point in time, including those points that are past or future with respect to us.

If Flatland were linearly ordered with an absolute middle, there might be an absolute Flatland *here*, which in the Flatland world could be occupied by only one Flatlander at a time. Nonetheless, if Flatland were small enough, then from the point of view of a human observer in the three-dimensional world, all of Flatland could be *here* at once. And yet it would not follow and it would not be true that all of Flatland would be *here* with respect to any occupant of Flatland. So it could be the case both that only one thing in Flatland could be *here* at once (with respect to the occupants of Flatland) and also that all of Flatland could be *here* at once (with respect to the inhabitants of the three-dimensional world). The reason for this apparently paradoxical claim is that all of Flatland can be encompassed within the metaphysically bigger *here* of the three-dimensional world.

An analogous point holds with regard to the present, on the doctrine of eternity. With respect to God in the eternal present, all of time is encompassed within the eternal present, insofar as all of time is ET-simultaneous with the eternal present. But it does not follow and is not true that all of

time is present with respect to anything temporal at any particular temporal location.

It may help to make this point clear if we briefly consider the question: “Does an eternal God know what time it is now?” For the sake of discussion, suppose that the indexical ‘now’ is ineliminable and that there is an absolute temporal present, as distinct from a present that is merely relative to some particular temporal entity. Could an eternal God know what time the absolute *now* is?

On the supposition that there is an absolute present, then in time there is a fact of the matter about how far history has unrolled. With regard to the inhabitants in time, at any given moment in time as that moment in time becomes present, history has unrolled *that* far. And this is something an eternal God can know. Furthermore, because the whole of eternity is ET-simultaneous with each temporal event as it is actually happening, an eternal God can know all the events actually occurring at any particular time as well as the temporal location of that time and its being experienced as absolutely present by temporal entities at that time.

But after these things, there is nothing further for God to know about what time it is now. There is no time in the eternal now; and, from the standpoint of the eternal present, every temporal event, as it is part of the absolute temporal present, is present to God. In the life of an eternal God, no *temporal* moment has any more claim than any other to be *for God* the absolute present.

A rough image may help make the point more intuitively available. Imagine two parallel horizontal lines, the upper one representing eternity and the lower one representing time; and let presentness be represented by light. Then, with respect to things in time, we might say, the temporal present is represented by a dot of light that moves along the lower line, which is lighted successively, moment by moment. The eternal present is represented by the upper line’s being entirely lighted at once. For any temporal present, with respect to something in that temporal present, the whole line of eternity is lit up at once; but time is lit up only instant by instant. On the other hand, with respect to an eternal God, the entire timeline is lit up at once.

So a particular moment in time may be both lit and not lit—only not at the same time. Just as in the example of Flatland and the three-dimensional world, once eternity is introduced, there are two different but equally real modes of existence; and *presentness* becomes relational. In relation to the unrolling of history, a moment of time may be not yet present. But in relation to the enduring and encompassing present of eternity, that same moment in time may be present, insofar as one and the same eternal present is ET-simultaneous with it.

With this much review of the doctrine of eternity, we can now turn to a sketch of Hasker’s position as regards God’s eternal knowledge of future free choices.

Hasker's Position

Hasker begins the development of his position on God's timeless knowledge by examining a much discussed argument of Alvin Plantinga's which attempts to show that taking God's knowledge to be timeless does not solve the problem of foreknowledge and free will.⁸ In this argument, Plantinga is making use of a common intuition, namely, that divine eternity is somehow now as fixed and determinate as the past is.

Linda Zagzebski puts that intuition this way:

[W]e have no more reason to think we can do anything about God's timeless knowing than about God's past knowledge. The timeless realm is as much out of our reach as the past.⁹

And so, she says, "the timelessness move does not avoid the problem of theological fatalism since an argument structurally parallel to the basic argument [for the incompatibility of foreknowledge and free will] can be formulated for timeless knowledge."¹⁰

Here is Plantinga's version of such an argument (with dates changed for the sake of the argument):

Suppose in fact Paul will mow his lawn in 2095. Then the proposition *God (eternally) knows that Paul mows in 2095* is now true. That proposition, furthermore, was true eighty years ago; the proposition *God knows (eternally) that Paul mows in 2095* not only *is true now*, but *was true then*. Since what is past is necessary, it is now necessary that this proposition was true eighty years ago. But it is logically necessary that if this proposition was true eighty years ago, then Paul mows in 2095. Hence his mowing then is necessary in just the way the past is. But, then it neither now is nor in future will be within Paul's power to refrain from mowing.¹¹

Plantinga thinks that since this argument makes use of the notion of God's *eternal* knowledge and nevertheless leads to the conclusion that Paul's "mowing [in 2095] is necessary in just the way the past is . . . , the claim that God is outside of time is essentially irrelevant"¹² to any solution to the problem of foreknowledge and free will.

Plantinga's argument depends on taking the past truth of the proposition *God eternally knows that Paul mows in 2095* as a hard fact about the past, to which the fixity of the past applies. But Hasker argues that whether or not this is a hard fact about the past depends on whether the proposition *God eternally knows that Paul mows in 2095* is itself a hard fact. From Hasker's point of view, the success of Plantinga's argument depends on whether or not "propositions about the eternal acts of God [are] 'necessary' in the same way in which the past is necessary."¹³

On the one hand, in the spirit of the intuition expressed by Zagzebski, Hasker claims that it certainly seems as if they are. He says,

as of the present moment, it is in many respects *not yet determined* how the future shall be. . . . God's timeless eternity . . . certainly cannot be open in this way; *every* fact is determined to be as it is, and not in any other way.¹⁴

On the other hand, however, Hasker says that when an eternal God looks at time: "God distinguishes necessities and contingencies [in time] even though there is no contingency left in the latter in the form in which they reach His gaze."¹⁵ And so God looks at all of time as a temporal being would look at the temporal past.

Hasker thinks that it follows from this that we are related to God's eternal present as we are related to the future:

[I]f God in his eternity looks upon our time as one would look back on the past, it follows that in a certain respect *we* can view, or rather conceive of, eternity as we conceive of the future!¹⁶

And from this claim, Hasker goes on to infer that "eternity is like the future, and unlike the past, in that *it is still open to our influence*."¹⁷

Consequently, Hasker says,

facts about God's eternal knowledge . . . are not hard facts. . . . [P] There are things that God timelessly believes which are such that it is in my power, now, to bring it about that God does not timelessly believe these things.¹⁸

And he concludes this way: "If, and only if, this proposition [P] is possible, is the doctrine of divine timelessness consistent with libertarian free will."¹⁹

So, Hasker thinks Plantinga's argument is unsuccessful. If it is not a hard fact that God eternally knows that Paul mows in 2095, then the necessity of the past does not apply to it; and so the inference in Plantinga's argument to the conclusion that it is necessary that Paul mow is invalid.

Nonetheless, Hasker thinks, this rebuttal of Plantinga's argument should give no joy to the proponent of God's timelessness, because it comes at a considerable cost. That is because it is impossible that God should use a knowledge "derived from the actual occurrence of future events to determine his own prior actions in the providential governance of the world."²⁰ Even if God's timeless knowledge of the future is not incompatible with human free will, on Hasker's view, God cannot use that knowledge in interacting with human beings.

Plantinga's Argument and Hasker's Objection

Although Hasker is trying to defend the doctrine of eternity against Plantinga's argument, his objections to Plantinga's argument are themselves hard to

square with the doctrine of eternity. In particular, the premises of Hasker's argument for his crucial claim that facts about God's eternal knowledge are not hard facts seem incompatible with the doctrine of eternity.

Consider, to begin with, Hasker's statement that when God looks at time, he looks at it as if it were the temporal past, in which no contingency is left in anything that was once contingent. On the doctrine of eternity, it is not possible for God to be related to anything as past. On the contrary, everything in time is ET-simultaneous with the whole of God's life. For the same reason, it is not true that for an eternal God all contingency has gone out of contingencies in time. God is related to contingent things as they are present, but nothing about this relation renders the contingent things past or non-contingent with respect to God.

Someone might worry here that even if contingent things are present with respect to God, there is still the necessity of the present. But however exactly we are to understand the necessity of the present, it does not take away contingency. If Paula in the temporal present sees Jerome smile at her, it does not follow that Jerome's smiling at her loses its contingency because it is present. What makes Jerome's smiling contingent is the fact that he might not have smiled; nothing that acted on him in advance of his smiling made his smiling necessary. And that fact about the contingency of his smiling stays the same even when the smiling is present. So, for God in the eternal present, the contingencies of time remain contingent even when in the eternal present he is related to them as ET-simultaneous with himself.

By parity of reasoning, the doctrine of eternity also rules out Hasker's claim that with respect to things in the temporal present, eternity is future or relevantly like the future. On the doctrine of eternity, it is not possible for anything in eternity to be future with respect to time. The only relation that holds between the eternal present of God and any events in time is ET-simultaneity. At any point of time, the whole of eternity is present to that time with ET-simultaneity; nothing about the eternal present is future with respect to any time.

Finally, consider the conclusion Hasker draws from these premises: "There are things that God timelessly believes which are such that it is in my power, now, to bring it about that God does not timelessly believe these things."²¹ In other words, on Hasker's view, in the eternal present God believes *p*; but I have it in my power in the temporal present to bring it about that in the eternal present God does not believe *p*.

But, on the doctrine of eternity, this is also impossible. There is no succession in eternity. And so it is not possible for an eternal God first to believe *p* and then to believe not-*p*. If there are things that God believes in the eternal present, those are the things that God believes; and it is not possible for him to believe things different from those. A fortiori, it is not in anyone's power in the temporal present to bring it about that in the eternal present God believes things different from those that he believes [had believed?] in the eternal present.

So, it seems that the premises of Hasker's argument against Plantinga are not compatible with the doctrine of eternity, and the conclusion he draws

from them seems incompatible with the doctrine as well. Consequently, Hasker's attempt to rebut Plantinga's argument and defend the compatibility of free will and God's eternal knowledge is not successful.

Plantinga's Argument and the Doctrine of Eternity

Nonetheless, in my view, Hasker's evaluation of Plantinga's argument is right: Plantinga's argument does not succeed in demonstrating that there is an incompatibility between free will and God's eternal knowledge. The compatibility of free will and God's eternal knowledge can be defended against Plantinga's argument in a way different from Hasker's.

From the past truth of a proposition about God's eternal knowledge of a future event, Plantinga's argument tries to show that the future event is somehow fixed or inevitable *now*, before the event occurs. In my view, the doctrine of eternity renders this move problematic.

To see what difference the doctrine of eternity makes to this move, consider the same move on the supposition that God is temporal. On this supposition, if

(a) In 1932 (g) *God knows that in 2095 Paul mows* is true,

then in 1932 there is a state of affairs that corresponds to (g); and that state of affairs is God's knowing in 1932 that in 2095 Paul mows. Furthermore, in 1932 God knows that in 2095 Paul mows only if in 2095 Paul mows. So since in 1932 God does know this, then in 1932 the world must be the way God knows it to be. If in 1932 there were no mowing in 2095, then in 1932 the world would not be the way it must be for God in 1932 to know that in 2095 Paul mows; and so it would not be knowledge that God had in 1932. But since God does have this knowledge, then in 1932 it is the case that in 2095 Paul mows. Consequently, it is now the case that in 2095 Paul mows.

If God were temporal, then, these inferences would be valid:

(a) In 1932 (g) *God knows that in 2095 Paul mows* is true.

Therefore, (b) in 1932 God knows that in 2095 Paul mows.

Therefore, (c) in 2095 Paul mows.

Therefore, (d) it is now the case that *in 2095 Paul mows*.

But once we add in the doctrine of eternity, the inference from a suitably reformulated version of (a) to (b) is invalid, and it no longer supports (d) either.

On the doctrine of eternity, the state of affairs of God's knowing that in 2095 Paul mows obtains in the eternal present. God's eternal knowledge does not obtain in 1932, because it does not obtain at any temporal location whatsoever. In 1932, (g) is true only because in the eternal present God has the relevant knowledge, and the eternal present is ET-simultaneous with 1932.

So, from

(a') In 1932, (g') *God in the eternal present knows that in 2095 Paul mows* is true

it does not follow that

(a) In 1932 God knows that in 2095 Paul mows,

because God's knowledge cannot be temporally located in 1932.

So much is relatively uncontroversial. It is also the case, however, that if (a) is suitably reformulated as (a'), it no longer supports (d). When the object of the knowledge God has in the eternal present is something temporal, then what is known by an eternal God has a temporal location; but it does not share that temporal location with God's knowing of it. Instead, God's knowing is ET-simultaneous with the temporal location of what is known. God's knowing in the eternal present that in 2095 Paul will mow is ET-simultaneous with the time in 2095 when Paul mows.

Certainly, God's knowing in the eternal present that in 2095 Paul mows requires that in 2095 Paul mows. If there were no mowing on Paul's part in 2095, then it would not be knowledge that God has in the eternal present. But it is not the case that if *in 1932* there were no mowing in 2095 to correspond to God's knowing, then it would not be knowledge that God has in the eternal present.

In order for it to be knowledge about Paul's mowing that God has in the eternal present, it is sufficient that there be a relation of ET-simultaneity between God's eternal present and the temporal location in which Paul mows. And there is, since God is ET-simultaneous with every time, including the time in 2095 when Paul mows. But it does not follow that *it is the case now, in the temporal present*, that in 2095 Paul mows. In order to ground God's knowledge of Paul's mowing in 2095, it is not necessary that Paul's mowing in 2095 somehow obtains or is fixed already in the temporal present. What grounds God's knowledge obtains in 2095; and, unlike God, the temporal present is not simultaneous in any sense with respect to 2095.

In other words, from

(a') In 1932 (g) *God in the eternal present knows that in 2095 Paul mows* is true,

it follows that

(a) In 2095 Paul mows.

But it does not follow that

- (a) It is now the case that in 2095 Paul mows.

Of course, from the denial of (d) it doesn't follow that

- (a) It is now the case that in 2095 Paul does not mow.

Because in the eternal present God can be ET-simultaneous with future events that do not yet obtain in the temporal present, God's knowledge can have a grounding in something future with respect to us without its being the case that the future event is already fixed in the temporal present. *Now*, in the temporal present, neither Paul's mowing nor his not mowing is fixed. Nonetheless, in the eternal present God can know that in 2095 Paul mows, since God is ET-simultaneous with the time in 2095 at which Paul's mowing occurs.

Claim (a') is true because there is a relation of ET-simultaneity between the eternal present and 1932, a time past with respect to us. And claim (g') is true because there is a relation of ET-simultaneity between the eternal present and Paul's mowing in 2095, a time future with respect to us. But ET-simultaneity is not a transitive relation. From the fact that 1932 is ET-simultaneous with the eternal present and the eternal present is ET-simultaneous with 2095, it does not follow that 1932 is simultaneous with 2095. And so Paul's mowing in 2095 is not something that is the case in 1932. It is therefore also not the case that it is necessary with the necessity of the past. The intransitivity of ET-simultaneity invalidates all inferences of the form 'It is now true that God knows *p*; therefore, it is now the case that *p*,' where '*p*' ranges over future contingent propositions.

So the crucial claim of Plantinga's argument can be true:

Necessarily, if *God eternally knows that Paul mows in 2095* was true eighty years ago, then Paul mows in 2095;

and yet the conclusions Plantinga derives from this claim can be false. It follows from this claim that in 2095 Paul mows, but it does not follow that it is now necessary that in 2095 Paul mows or that Paul has no power over whether or not he mows in the future.

God's knowledge in the eternal present of events that are present to him but future with respect to us does not imply that those future events are the case in the temporal present, fixed somehow before they actually occur in time. And so God's knowledge in the eternal present of events future with respect to us is compatible with human free will in those future events.

Hasker on the Uselessness of Eternal Knowledge

Similar reflections also undercut Hasker's reasons for rejecting the usefulness of God's eternal knowledge to God's ability to act in time.

What Hasker actually says is,

it is impossible that God should use a knowledge “derived from the actual occurrence of future events to determine his own prior actions in the providential governance of the world.”²²

Here Hasker is presupposing that God’s actions are prior to the occurrence of future events. But this presupposition is impossible on the doctrine of eternity. Nothing in the eternal life of God is prior with respect to anything in time, and nothing in time is future with respect to anything in the eternal life of God.

We can, however, reformulate Hasker’s reasons so that they do not inadmissibly attribute temporal succession to an eternal God. Hasker’s thought seems to be or to depend on the other side of the coin of the intuition expressed in the quotation from Zagzebski above: the present is fixed and determinate, the temporal present as much as the eternal present. In either mode, once something *is* present, it seems that nothing can be done to alter it, not even by God.

On Hasker’s way of thinking about it, when God knows future events, they are *already* there for him to know; and so Hasker is attributing a temporal ordering to the relation between future events and God’s knowledge. But even if there is no temporal succession as between future events and God’s knowledge, there is a logical order; an event’s obtaining is logically prior to God’s knowing it. So even if the future events are not *already* there for God to know, it still seems as if the future events must be *there* in order for God to know them. And, in that case, Hasker’s point still seems to apply: since a future event must be *there* for God to know it, it seems that God cannot use his knowledge of that future event to act on it. And for that reason, God cannot act on a future event in light of his knowledge of it.

And so we have the conclusion Hasker wants, without attributing succession to an eternal God. Even if it is eternal, God’s knowledge of things future with respect to us seems useless for any action of God’s on future events.

In fact, we can make Hasker’s point stronger. On Hasker’s way of thinking about the matter, it seems that an eternal God cannot act in time at all. *Every temporal event* is ET-simultaneous with the whole of an eternal God’s life. So any act of God’s intended to have a causal effect at a particular time is ET-simultaneous with the things at that time. But then the things at that time are present to God. And if they are present, they are *there*, too. So in what way could God do anything about them? On Hasker’s approach, then, not only is an eternal God’s knowledge useless for guiding his interactions with things in time, but in fact God cannot act in time at all, with or without the guidance of knowledge.

But here we might stop to consider how anything in time acts on anything else in time. Consider a relatively simple case, drawn from neurophysiology, of causal interaction between two neurons. In the axon of neuron 1, there are seminal vesicles, small membrane-enclosed sacs. Each seminal vesicle contains molecules of a neurotransmitter—say, serotonin, for the sake of the

example. When neuron 1 fires, the membranes of some of the seminal vesicles in the axon of neuron 1 fuse with the membrane of neuron 1's axon at the axon terminal, the end of the axon. When a seminal vesicle's membrane fuses with the membrane of the axon terminal, the seminal vesicle is opened, and its contents, the serotonin molecules, are spilled into the synaptic cleft, the small space between neuron 1 and neuron 2. Once in the synaptic cleft, a serotonin molecule moves to dock into a receptor on the cell membrane of a dendrite of neuron 2. When it does, the receptor opens up and allows ions to enter into neuron 2, thereby changing the transmembrane potential and contributing to the firing of neuron 2.

Suppose that we think just about three temporally ordered events in the causal sequence in this example.

Event 1 at t_1 : causal interaction between the membrane of a seminal vesicle in neuron 1 and the cell membrane at the axon terminal of neuron 1 causes the membranes to fuse and the seminal vesicle to open.

Event 2 at t_2 : causal interaction between the serotonin molecules in an opened seminal vesicle and molecules in the synaptic cleft cause the serotonin molecules in that seminal vesicle to move across the synaptic cleft between neuron 1 and neuron 2.

Event 3 at t_3 : causal interaction between a serotonin molecule in the synaptic cleft and a receptor on the membrane of a dendrite of neuron 2 causes that receptor to open.

Two things about the exercise of causal power in these events are worth noting.

First, in each event, the thing exercising causal power co-exists with the thing on which its causal power is exercised. In event 1, the membrane of the seminal vesicle and the membrane of the axon terminal both exist at t_1 . And the same point holds about the serotonin molecule and the molecules in the synaptic cleft in event 2 and about the serotonin molecule and the receptor in event 3. In these ordinary kinds of cases, the thing that exercises causal power is simultaneous with the thing its causal power is exercised on.²³ Although God himself is not located at a time, God can meet this condition for causal influence on things in time in virtue of being ET-simultaneous with anything in time. In the eternal present, God can will that there be a causal influence on things at a time; and the things at that time, whatever it is, will be ET-simultaneous with God's eternal present.

Secondly, event 3 at t_3 happens at least in part because of event 2 at t_2 , and event 2 at t_2 happens at least in part because of event 1 at t_1 . But the *because of* relation here should not be confused with a temporal relation. As things are in the temporal world, the *because of* relation obtaining between one of these events and another takes place in a temporally ordered series. But it is the *because of* relation that is doing the work.

By way of a help to intuition here, consider a petitionary prayer for healing made at t_1 . Someone might suppose that an eternal God could not

respond to this prayer because a response to prayer has to come *after* the prayer, but an eternal God cannot do anything after anything else. This supposition is mistaken, however. For something to be a response to a prayer, it has to occur *because of* the prayer. But this is not the same as occurring after the prayer, even if in the temporal world a response that occurs because of a prayer occurs after the prayer. In one and the same the eternal present, God can be aware of the prayer for healing at t_1 and will that there be healing at t_2 . In this case, although God's willing of healing is not later than the prayer, it is nonetheless because of the prayer. And being because of the prayer is sufficient for God's willing to count as a response to the prayer.

Analogously, the movement at t_2 of serotonin molecules across the synaptic cleft happens because of the fusing of the membrane of the vesicle with the membrane of the axon of neuron 1 at t_1 . It is true that the exercise of causal power at t_1 is temporally located prior to the effects of the exercise of that causal power at t_2 . But the effects at t_2 happen because of the causal influences operating at t_1 , and not in virtue of the temporal location of the things exercising the causal influence.

Consequently, an event 2 at a time t_2 could happen at least in part because of what God wills, even if God's willing is not prior to the event at t_2 . God in the eternal present could will to ward off some cause that (but for God's causal intervention) would have destroyed neuron 1 and all its contents right after the fusing of membranes at t_1 and right before the release of the serotonin into the synaptic cleft. Then what happens in event 2 at t_2 would happen at least in part because of what in the eternal present God wills, even though God's willing is not temporally ordered with respect to event 2.

A similar point can be made about event 3. In the eternal present, God could will to ward off a cause that (but for God's causal intervention) would have destroyed all the serotonin in the synaptic cleft in the period between t_2 and t_3 . Then what happens at event 3 would happen at least in part because of what God wills in the eternal present. The fact that God is not temporally ordered with respect to event 3 in no way hinders this from being the case.

So the fact that event 2 is ET-simultaneous with God's eternal present does not mean that God gets to event 2 too late to act on it, as it were. It is a mistake to suppose that God is unable to exercise causal influence on event 2 on the grounds that, for God, event 2 is *there* and fixed with the necessity of present. Because God is ET-simultaneous with what is prior to event 2, event 2 is what it is at least in part because of what God in the eternal present wills to happen at times prior to t_2 . Since God is ET-simultaneous with every moment of time as that moment is present, God can exercise causal influence in the same manner at any time. What happens at t_{n+m} happens at least in part because of the casual effects which God in the eternal present wills to happen at t_n . In this way, without being himself in time, in one and the same eternal present, God can will in such a way that he exercises causal influence over the whole temporally ordered causal sequence of events in time.

This interpretation of an eternal God's actions in time can be applied also to God's knowledge of things in time.

In the example above, it is true that there is a logical dependence between event 2 and God's knowledge of event 2. God knows event 2 because event 2 obtains, and not the other way around.²⁴ But, in the eternal present, which is ET-simultaneous with t_1 , God wills to exercise causal influence at t_1 in such a way that event 2 happens at least in part because of what God wills to happen before t_2 . God's knowledge of event 2, then, depends on event 2; but event 2 itself depends on God's causal influence at t_1 . God's knowledge of event 2 therefore includes knowledge of his own causal influence helping to bring about event 2.

And, clearly, this conclusion generalizes. Suppose that time has an end, as well as a beginning, and that there is a last time, t_n , as well as a first time, t_1 . And suppose that at t_n there is a last event En . Although God knows En because it is there, En is there for God to know at least in part because of what God in one and the same eternal present wills to happen in the whole of time before t_n . And, in the eternal present, God wills what he does with respect to all those causal influences on En in light of everything God knows in the eternal present about every other event in time, which has also occurred at least in part because of what God in the eternal present wills to occur in the period prior to t_n .

Since God's knowledge of En takes place in the one eternal present that is the whole of God's life, the knowledge that God has when he acts with respect to En is the same knowledge that God has with respect to events taking place at t_1 . Consequently, for any events, from t_1 to t_n , God can use his knowledge of an event at one time to shape the events of a later time. With respect to any event, although God knows that event because it is there, the event is there at least in part because of the causal influence that in the eternal present God exercises in time. Since God in the eternal present knows everything that he wills to occur as a result of his causal influence in time, what happens at least because of God's knowledge of it. So when God knows En , En is there for God to know at least in part because of the causal influence God in the eternal present exerts at times prior to t_n .

The flaw in Hasker's argument for the uselessness of God's eternal knowledge is the supposition that the logical dependence of God's knowledge on the events known obviates God's ability to use his knowledge to shape his actions. On the doctrine of eternity, the logical dependence of God's knowledge on the events known does not rule out the causal dependence of those events on God's acts, and those acts are included in God's knowledge. And so, in this sense, the events are dependent on God's knowledge. Because God is not temporally ordered with respect to events in time, God's act of will with respect to any event at a time t_m will be made in light of God's knowledge of all the events in time, including those future with respect to us.

Conclusion

In various other places, I have argued against the Hasker's view that the God of classical theism is religiously inadequate or disappointing.²⁵ In those places, I have tried to show that a simple, eternal, immutable, impassible God can be as intimate with human beings and responsive to them as any open theist could desire. For a classical theist such as Aquinas, God is a risk-taker, too.²⁶

In this paper, I have not recapitulated those arguments for classical theism. Instead, I have focused on the second of Hasker's reasons for rejecting classical theism, namely, that even if it could reconcile God's timeless knowledge of the future with human free will, it has to do so in a way that makes God's knowledge of the future useless for God's governance of the world. As I have tried to show, the doctrine of eternity can resolve the problem of divine foreknowledge and free will without the cost Hasker supposes it to have.

Notes

1. William Hasker, *Providence, Evil, and the Openness of God* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 97.
2. *Ibid.*, 101.
3. Cf. Hasker, *Providence*, 100.
4. There are others who make similar claims. See, for example, Alvin Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 235–269, reprinted in Thomas V. Morris, ed., *The Concept of God* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), 171–200; and Linda Zagzebski, *The Dilemma of Freedom and Foreknowledge* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991). See also Linda Zagzebski, "Foreknowledge and Free Will," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011 ed. URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/free-will-foreknowledge/>.
5. Hasker, *Providence*, 100.
6. Others have argued for this conclusion too. See, for example, Michael Rota, "The Eternity Solution to the Problem of Human Freedom and Divine Foreknowledge," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 165–186; and his "A Problem for Hasker: Freedom With respect to the Present, Hard Facts, and Theological Incompatibilism," *Faith and Philosophy* 27, no. 3 (July 2010): 287–305. Rota's approach to Hasker's conclusion is very helpful, and I have learned from it. But I myself will take a somewhat different approach here.
7. The translation of Boethius's definition is one Norman Kretzmann and I constructed; see our "Eternity," *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429–458.
8. William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989). Hasker takes himself to have given conclusive arguments for his view of eternity and free will in this book, and I will here concentrate on his arguments in that book.
9. Zagzebski, *Dilemma*, 2011.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Plantinga, "On Ockham's Way Out," 239.
12. *Ibid.*, 240.
13. Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, 174.
14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 175. Hasker is here quoting Arthur Prior, who himself attributes the thought to Anselm.
16. *Ibid.*, 175.
17. *Ibid.*, 175–176.
18. *Ibid.*, 176.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, 63.
23. My point is not that causal power is always exercised in this way, only that it can be and ordinarily is exercised in this way.
24. Cf. Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, “Eternity and God’s Knowledge: A Reply to Shanley,” *The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998): 439–445.
25. See, most recently, “Eternity, Simplicity, and Presence,” in *The Science of Being as Being: Metaphysical Investigations*, ed. Gregory T. Doolan (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 243–263, reprinted as “Eternity, Simplicity, and Presence,” in *God, Eternity, and Time*, eds. Christian Tapp and Edmund Runggaldier (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 29–45. See also the chapters on simplicity and on grace and free will in my *Aquinas* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003).
26. The Thomistic God may, however, not be a risk-taker in precisely Hasker’s sense. Hasker defines divine risk-taking this way:

God takes risks if he makes decisions that depend for their outcomes on the responses of free creatures in which the decisions themselves are not informed by knowledge of the outcomes.

(Hasker, *Providence*, 125)

The Thomistic God is a risk-taker in the sense that he makes decisions that depend for their outcomes on the responses of free creatures, when those responses are not themselves determined by God. So Aquinas accepts both the biblical claim that God wants all human beings to be saved and the doctrine that some human beings are not saved. That this is so explains why Aquinas needs to distinguish between God’s antecedent and his consequent will. His antecedent will is what God would have willed if things had been up to him alone; his consequent will is what God in fact does will given what creatures freely will.

From my point of view, the version of risk-taking engaged in by the Thomistic God is sufficient for real risk. Hasker says that God is a risk-taker in the sense that “creatures’ decisions may be contrary to God’s wishes, and in this case God’s intentions in making those decisions may be at least partly frustrated” (Hasker, *Providence*, 125). If we substitute ‘antecedent will’ for ‘decisions’ in Hasker’s claim, then Aquinas’s views commit him to the same claim.

2 God's Knowledge of an Unreal Future

Sandra Visser

In contemporary discussions on topics of philosophical theology there are pages upon pages written by Christians about the nature of free will, the possibility of God's foreknowledge given human free will, or the problem of evil. In these discussions, the arguments often start with the nature of time, free will, or evil, and follow up with the nature of God's knowledge. In thinking about problems of time, free will, etc., authors frequently end up with views that have certain entailments about the nature of God's knowledge. This is not so for medieval philosophers or even contemporary philosophers specializing in medieval philosophy, where thinking about God himself and his attributes apart from problems one might wish to solve independently is considerably more common. And perhaps the contemporary mode is better—for one might be appropriately modest about what a human could figure out about the nature of God apart from any revelation God sees fit to give one. Nonetheless, it might prove to be helpful to think about *how* God might know the many things that philosophers assert that God *does* know about the universe, and *then* considering what that means of knowing might entail about free will, time, and providence, to mention three topics where entailments are widely discussed. It will emerge that the only reasonable possibilities for God's knowledge are a version that entails that human free will is compatible with both theological and causal determinism and one that licenses only the weakest version of an openness view of God's knowledge where openness here is understood as the weak claim that God knows all truths, but that not all propositions about the future have truth values.

The only way to be able to write and think about this question is to suppose that there are some deep similarities between God as a knower and humans as knowers. Perhaps the best we can do is to make sense of God knowing things in ways that are the same as, or at least very similar to, the ways that humans come to know things.¹ So, it seems fairly obvious that God could² know what he does in two general ways: by efficaciously deciding that the world will be a particular way or by finding out that the world is a particular way. These two ways break further into various combinations.³

We'll begin by trying to understand what it means to say that God knows about the world by deciding it will be in a particular way. In discussing

this (and all other) option(s), I will assume without argument that God is omnipotent, the creator and sustainer of all things, wholly good, and loving. In light of God's nature, it would appear that it is up to God, at least in part, what or when God knows. Presumably, in general, a creator decides what it is that she is going to create. So, too, in the case of God's creating.

Suppose that God's creative act is such that God's decrees determine everything, including the actions of every creature, about the created order. Then God knows the future,⁴ in addition to the past and present, because God decrees it. This position might or not might include the claim that the decrees are causally efficacious. In the strongest case, God's decrees directly cause subsequent actions. Not many people think that under these circumstances humans would be free, but there are some. This view would entail compatibilism with God's foreknowledge (or eternal knowledge) as well as determinism. It would be nice if it was convincing, for it would allow one to hold that God is omniscient and a temporal, that humans have free will, and that presentism is true. Unfortunately, it is difficult to see how all of these things could be true simultaneously. Even some of the staunchest Calvinists have a hard time with it.⁵

Suppose instead that God, desiring to create a world in which some creatures are free, decrees that such creatures exist. Suppose further, that creatures' actions are free only in those instances in which they are not causally or theologically determined (i.e., causal incompatibilism is true). In this case, how could God still know the future? At least four distinct answers to this question have been offered.

First, some version of Molinism might be true or some version of Molinism paired with a version of Ockhamism.⁶ For those unconvinced that these options make sense, there is another traditional view.

The next few views will all be variations of ones in which God is assumed to be atemporal. The differences among the views will be based on considerations of *how* it is that God knows the future.

Second, God might be atemporal and create creatures that are free in an incompatibilist way. On this view a creature wouldn't be free if God caused any of the creatures' actions, either by determining them through causal laws or by directly determining them. On this theory, reminiscent of Boethius, God would create and *then find out* about what we call the future by seeing everything unfold, as it were, by "seeing" our timeline as a tapestry. The idea is that such a seeing would not interfere with human free will any more than we think that humans watching other humans act limits free will.

While initially appealing, there are two problems with this view. First, this position looks inconsistent with the existence of an atemporal God at all. This view requires that the B-series is true. Suppose that God decrees the B-series, then the past, present, and future are all real. Suppose also that God decrees that some form of indeterminism is true. Then, some aspects of the future, though they exist, will not be determined by the past and laws of nature. So, it could be that if some of those future acts are performed by

humans, they would be free according to the incompatibilist. To think that God would find out by seeing or being having immediate awareness of the created order rather than by decreeing, would be to contradict the assumption that God is unchanging, and thus atemporal, because God's knowledge would increase (change) subsequent to creation, for God could not see and thus know the free actions of created humans until *after* they exist. The person holding this view might not be terribly bothered by this because it would only be one change in God's knowledge, but it would still be a change, and so God would be temporal, contrary to our initial assumption.

The second problem with this particular theory of how God knows is that it eliminates the possibility that God interacts, guides, or in any other way interacts with the temporal order; God is not sovereign or able to act providentially. On this view, God finds out too late to do anything. Recall that this view is that God does not decree down to the detail what will happen to leave room for free will. God instead finds out what the free beings will do after God creates. But then, because God is atemporal, and thus, unchanging God cannot react to what he finds out, because if he does, he will change, and thus not be atemporal.⁷ For if God sees the future all at once, and that's how God finds out what's happening, God finds out too late—for God's knowledge is eternal and unchanging. What he sees is what he gets, and it will be too late for him to intervene in any fashion—for obviously that would be a change.⁸ But the seeing-all-at-once metaphor does help to make the point that God's knowledge *per se* wouldn't affect whether the action was free. How God acquires that knowledge is what will be relevant, not the mere fact that God knows. Finding out by seeing is not consistent with a robust view of providence, so we will consider a third view.

A third cluster of views suggest that there are true facts about the future (and no propositions about the future without a truth-value), presentism is true, and God could know what will happen in the future in some unspecified way. This is Trenton Merricks's view.⁹ The view comes to this: God knows how humans will freely act in the future (and the outcomes of all indeterministic processes, quantum ones, for example) and God's knowledge depends on the how the world is. This view preserves the insight that God's merely knowing something is not incompatible with free will. God knows what humans do precisely because of what they do, not because he determines (or nature determines) that they do what they do. God's knowledge is dependent (though not causally dependent) on human activity. This feature of God's knowledge, according to Merricks, is consistent with free human action. Merricks is quick to point out that the "because" here is non-causal, so his view doesn't require backwards causation, though the dependency relation is from future facts to present facts. What it does require is that future contingents have truth values, and those truth-values depend on how the world will be.

On the face of it, this seems like a very nice option: it confirms foreknowledge, free will, and presentism. However, it has one thing going against it.

It's pretty incredible once we carefully consider how God comes to know about the future. First note that this is a view in which God is temporal, since he comes to know how the world is based on how the world is once it exists, not by decreeing how the world is to be. On this view, God foreknows the future the instant after he creates. And this is what is hard to believe. On this view, God decides to create and decides what to create, but doesn't know what (in all its future particulars and changes) it is that he's created until the instant he creates. But how is it that the world becomes actualized or material is what is necessary for God to know? That would be a mystery indeed. For the only difference between the instant before creation and the instant after is matter—nothing in the concepts, properties, essences . . . of anything that is changed except for the material ones. That doesn't seem relevant either to the truth of future contingents or to God's knowledge. Suppose that the claim is that it is being that makes a difference, or that, in fancier language, truth supervenes on being. That might be true, but it's hard to see how it supervenes on the being of creation rather than the creator. The source of all being is God, and God exists and decrees the existence of created order. How is it that the existence of contingent beings (presumably non-physical necessary things already exist) suddenly increases God's knowledge? It is the existence of some contingent stuff that does this, for the stuff on which the truth of many of the propositions that God now knows depends does not yet exist. This view is either incredible on the face of it or not. It's true that the position is consistent. But, either one finds it incredible or not. If not, I don't know how to convey what's incredible about it.

Fourth, God might come to know from a combination of knowing what sorts of things he desires to create. If God desires free will and free will is incompatible with causation, and further, that God couldn't possibly know any indeterminate aspects of the future, *pace* Merricks, before it occurred, God does not know the future until it occurs. On this view, future contingents do not have truth-values and God knows all truths, but God's knowledge grows—there are more things to know as time goes on. That is, he created in such a way that his knowledge of what humans are isn't sufficient to know everything they will do. God, obviously, is temporal on this option as well, and it's one that is properly called a version of open theism.

This option is clearly inconsistent with the Church fathers, something I think one ought not take lightly.¹⁰ How differently open theism gets spelled out varies pretty widely. The question for the purposes of this paper is how distant need it be from the traditional view of God as atemporal and immutable? How far do epistemic and metaphysical issues concerning knowledge, time, and free will push this view away from the tradition? And how close to considerations of God's moral perfection keep it to the tradition? Notice that the ramifications of these issues don't force one to relinquish any of the motivations for embracing atemporality. God's knowledge of the future, for example, could be complete if the future exists. Immutability could be spelled out in terms of God having a changeless and perfect character, God

having fixed purposes both generally and with respect to each individual creature. Even omniscience might be preserved, though our understanding of it will be deepened in a way similar to the deepening of our understanding of omnipotence. God can only do those things which are logically possible, and likewise, God can only know those things which are possible to know. It turns out that fewer things are possible to do and know than we might antecedently have thought.

Suppose then, that God decides to create a world in which even he can't know the truth-value of future contingents (because there aren't any). If incompatibilism is true, this will be because God, in order to satisfy his desire to have free creatures, will create a world in which the natural laws are indeterministic in a way that is congenial to the exercise of human free will. But God will only create a world with such creatures if it is consistent with his own glory and greatness, but also is good for the creatures which he creates. It is true, that, were we to try some sort of measure or comparison, what is good for God would always outweigh what is good for creatures. However, it is also true that God is wholly good, and thus that he is the sort of person who would care about the good of whatever it is he brought into existence. If perfect goodness entails anything, it at least entails that.

We see then that if incompatibilism is true and future contingents do not have a truth-value, then God decided to limit how much he could know. What will God not know? Because the limit is both self-imposed and constrained by God's goodness, God's knowledge of the future will be sufficient for him to accomplish any and all of his purposes. Thus, according to this version of open theism, there is no question about whether God is in control and able to act sovereignly. Nor is there any question about whether good will ultimately prevail or whether any evil will happen to a person in such a way that God is surprised, caught unawares, or in any other way wrong footed by any event—good or bad, that might occur without his foreknowledge. God would not create a world in which his plans could be thwarted because that would be inconsistent both with his goodness and his power. God would not create a world that he did not fully understand. Thus, God's knowledge of the world would be truly immense. There could be no question that God would be surprised by anything humans would do—it would be irresponsible of God to create beings that could harm themselves in a way that would be surprising to him. It would be inconsistent with his goodness. In this way, God is very unlike humans, who regularly invent things that they don't fully understand, much to the detriment of many others. But even this feature of the humans is one that wouldn't be surprising to God. If it were, or if he couldn't prevent this sort of behavior, we would have reason to question his goodness.¹¹ Thus, God would not permit any situation to occur in which there were any sort of uncertainty about important matters. God could always intervene to prevent such occurrences. Notice that this version of openness is consistent with robust providential action,¹² knowledge of the Fall (God would know that the creatures were such that, by

nature, they would inevitably choose to rebel), and other matters of importance to orthodoxy.¹³

I don't think we can definitively figure out, antecedently and apart from revelation (or even with revelation), exactly how much God decrees by just thinking about what and how God knows. We can eliminate certain possibilities, but then we need to consider other things we think we know, both about human beings, and about God. There are some interesting questions to ask here. How much would God want to know or need to know, consistent with his goodness? Our answers to this diverge wildly, but let's consider. God would not create anything inconsistent with his goodness. And being good, he would want what is best for his creation. He couldn't create anything that he knew could go terribly and irredeemably wrong for his creatures. Even if the universe isn't about us, but rather is about God and his glory, we play a role in it. Even if the bad things which happen to us are almost nothing compared to the glory of God, it seems that a being who loves his creation will not allow anything to go so badly. So, God will have to know enough about the future so that he can be sure that nothing will go irredeemably wrong. And he's powerful enough that he'll be able to ensure that whatever his plan is, it will occur. God will also know enough, both about individual people's tendencies, and the rest of the world's functioning, that he will know exactly when to step in. Things won't happen that catch him by surprise, given how much he knows, and he can easily anticipate future consequences of indeterministic actions or events, such that nothing will happen to surprise him. Consider the following, fairly weak analogy. A parent might go for a walk with her two-and-a-half-year-old riding beside her on a tricycle with a handle. The parent might let the child freely decide his own path. She might warn him to stay on the sidewalk, and that veering off might make him fall. She might tell him other things he needs to know. But in the end, she might permit him to decide his own path. She might even allow him to veer off the path and fall and hurt his knee. But even this she could prevent, should it be necessary. The kid, while free to take his own path, is never outside of the watchful care of his mother. There is no situation of importance that his mother isn't in control of. Similarly, God would have much greater knowledge of the tendencies of those beings he created and has even more immediate ability to intervene if he desires. His limited knowledge will only extend to those actions and events. Only indeterministic actions and events will limit his knowledge. Since God can intervene at any time he deems necessary for his plans to be fulfilled in the way he wants them to be (thus, perhaps, but not necessarily, overriding someone's free will or violating a law of nature), there's no need to deny God's sovereignty with this limited version of openness. Philosophically, it's not obviously false.

Even this does not give us enough to distinguish between an open view of God's knowledge and a closed one. Most of it depends on what's required for free will. The only two reasonable possibilities are a full-blown compatibilism and a very limited openness view. Philosophically, human free will

and God's goodness combine only to motivate a very limited version of open theology.¹⁴ But that's a rather tough nut to crack. God's creating with limited knowledge is consistent with his creating us, but not consistent with all versions of open theism—we can eliminate some of those with this consideration. But the most conservative of those—well, I don't know of one piece of evidence or one good argument that will show that those are wrong. I think they are, but I don't have an argument to prove it. At this point I think that what is clear is that either some form of compatibilism must be true or else an open theism that is very constrained indeed.

Notes

1. God's knowledge might be different, and I am willing to think that God might know things in different ways that we do (more on that later).
2. This is speaking epistemically, of course. I suppose that whichever way God does in fact know, he knows that way metaphysically necessarily.
3. I will leave to one side the interesting question of necessary existents. That is, I will not discuss whether things like numbers exist independently of God's will or whether, God, in some way, decides on even the nature of numbers. More to the point, I will not discuss whether individual people have necessary haecceities or essences. Then God would find himself with certain abstract building blocks among which he would choose to actualize in his creation. This view is not uncommon in contemporary philosophy while it appears to be quite foreign to medieval thought. I do not know which is the best way to think about this particular issue, though fortunately for me, it doesn't matter which is right for the central purposes of this paper.
4. When I use a locution like, "God knows the future" in this paper, the reader should understand it to mean that God's knows what is past, present, and future for creation. If God is temporal, it will turn out that this knowledge is of the past, present, or future for God, too. However, I certainly do not mean to exclude the possibility that God is atemporal, and that God's own knowledge of these things is eternally present. So, the reader should understand references to God's knowledge of the future accordingly. It would make the paper difficult to read, and not improve the clarity of it at all to be explicit about this point in most cases. In those cases where it is important, I will be explicit about it.
5. Westminster Confessions, Chapter IX, Article 1. "God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that is neither forced, nor, by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good, or evil."
6. So much has been written on these topics that I'll let the reader pursue this option independently. I have nothing new to say about them.
7. The point here is not that if God acts based on his knowledge of the future that his activity is restricted by truths of the future. The point is that God can't react because God is unchanging if atemporal.
8. For completeness it is only fair to indicate that Stump's view of atemporality claims not to have this feature by positing three temporal orders. For those interested, look it up.
9. Trenton Merricks, "Foreknowledge and Freedom," *Philosophical Review* 120, no. 4 (2011): 567–586.
10. It was no mere accident that Christianity developed at the times and places it did and that it has the intellectual roots it does. Thus, deviations from the Church fathers should be taken with care.

11. Obviously there are questions about evil arising here, but there are many responses to the problem of evil which use the free will defense and make assumptions consistent with the ones I'm suggesting. See, for instance, the relevant works by Alvin Plantinga, Peter van Inwagen, and others.
12. In fact, it appears that God's providential action is greater here than on any other view, including the more traditional ones, except the view in which God decrees all things, including God's providential interaction with humanity.
13. One might wonder why one should care about orthodoxy. An argument for that position will take me too far afield. However, one might wonder whether one has any reason at all to believe in the existence of a kind of good, slightly bumbling, but well-meaning being. One's response to the problem of evil might lead one to this position, but since I think there are plausible answers to that group of problems that don't entail the existence of such a being, I don't find that to be a terribly persuasive argument. I can only record my own state in saying that I am uninterested in a being that isn't worthy of worship, only of prudent fear. Thus, the limited God of many open theists isn't going to be under consideration here.
14. Nothing about God's goodness would motivate some of the more excessive versions of openness which depend on a philosophically suspect and unnuanced theory of love, but that is a topic for another paper.

3 A Few Worries About the Systematic Metaphysics of Open Future Open Theism

Benjamin H. Arbour

Because there are so many different versions of open theism, I will clarify exactly which version(s) of openness theology that I will argue against. In what follows, I am concerned only with what is described as open future open theism (OFOT) as described in the introduction to this volume.

OFOT comes in two varieties. Defenders of each version of OFOT affirm that divine omniscience entails knowledge of all truths, so they disagree with William Hasker, Richard Swinburne, and Peter van Inwagen, who defend the idea that divine omniscience does not entail that God knows all truths. This alternative version of open theism, limited foreknowledge open theism (LFOT), redefines omniscience in modal terms by suggesting that God knows everything that is logically knowable.¹ However, while defenders of OFOT stand against LFOT, advocates of OFOT affirm divine knowledge of all truths for different reasons.

One important way to differentiate types of OFOT involves the principle of bivalence and the law of the excluded middle. Some open theists affirm that some propositions concerning future contingents (PCFCs) are presently true; these thinkers include Greg Boyd, Keith DeRose, William Hasker, Alan Rhoda, Richard Swinburne, and Peter van Inwagen. Other open theists deny that the principle of bivalence applies to PCFCs. Instead, they prefer some probabilistic, multivalent approach to the truth-values of PCFCs; among these thinkers are J.R. Lucas, Richard Purtill, Dale Tuggy, and Dean Zimmerman.²

According to Alan Rhoda's articulation of OFOT (hereafter Rhodanian OFOT), all PCFCs involving "will" or "will not" language are false. This position, which is sometimes called all-falsism, is thought to preserve the principle of bivalence for PCFCs, whereas an alternative articulation of OFOT championed by Dale Tuggy (hereafter Tuggyism OFOT) denies that the principle of bivalence applies to PCFCs. Either way, defenders of OFOT deny that God possesses exhaustive definite foreknowledge. In fact, both types of OFOT require denying that God possesses any foreknowledge of future contingents whatsoever.³ However, in what following I will be focusing solely on Rhodanian OFOT because that is the version gaining the most traction among open theists.

OFOT should be rejected, but not because it is incompatible with Anselmian perfect being theology. In what follows, I summarize both Tuggyism and Rhodanian articulations of OFOT. Next, I argue that the way that philosophy of time drives OFOT is incompatible with contemporary systematic metaphysics. I conclude by discussing a theological counter-example to OFOT that serves to demonstrate that even if a logically coherent systematic metaphysics could be developed to make sense of OFOT, such a metaphysics is not what has obtained in the actual world. Therefore, Christians who defend the idea that God is the being ultimately responsible for the creation of the world should not appeal to OFOT as the proper response to the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge (DFF).

Rhodanian Open Future Open Theism, Presentism, and Bivalence

Alan Rhoda has contributed prolifically to the literature on OFOT, and stands as the leading defender of what I call Rhodanian OFOT,⁴ but he is certainly not the only defender of this particular version of OFOT. However, because his recent work on the subject plays such a prominent role in contemporary discussion of open theism, and because he has published more on this topic than his counterparts, I will focus my interaction on his writings.⁵

According to Rhodanian OFOT, all PCFCs involving “will” and “will not” language are false. Obviously, this avoids the multi-valued, free logic required by Tuggyism OFOT. But understanding Rhoda’s argument for the falsity of PCFCs preserves bivalence requires a more detailed examination of his position. In what follows, I discuss Rhoda’s understanding of the semantic force of the wording of PCFCs in the light of both presentism and the correspondence theory of truth (both of which Rhoda affirms). I go on to show how the metaphysics of modality required by Rhodanian OFOT entails that free agents possess power over the actual world, which allows Ockhamism to settle any tensions created by the DFF. Finally, I conclude my critique of Rhodanian OFOT by showing that refuting the Ockhamist solution I propose, given all that is required by Rhodanian OFOT, requires a wholesale revision of contemporary systematic metaphysics.

One way Rhoda purports to preserve bivalence for PCFCs involves appealing to a Peircean understanding of the semantic content of PCFCs. This linguistics is rather complicated, and depends on two issues related to the metaphysics of time. First, Peirceans defend the A-theory of time, which means that that time is fundamentally tensed and explanations thereof cannot be reduced to “earlier-than,” or “later-than” relations. Rather, there is something important about the present, or the “now-ness,” that precludes the possibility of a B-theory of time. Furthermore, Peirceans motivate their understanding of the semantic force of PCFCs by way of presentism, which is the combination of the A-theory of time together with an ontology which

maintains that everything that exists is present, or, said differently, the only time that things exist is the present.⁶

The difference between Ockhamistic and Peircean understandings of PCFCs turn on how each school of thought interprets “will” or “will not” in statements such as “Abby will drink orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast.” Suppose that Abby is free with respect to whether or not she drinks orange juice tomorrow; that is, whether or not she actually drinks orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast is presently contingent; it is underdetermined by either her character and/or the laws of nature. According to the Ockhamist, it makes perfect sense to speak of the fact of what will or will not occur tomorrow with reference to Abby’s drinking the orange juice (or refraining from doing so, as the case may be)—*even though the event is contingent*. Thus, for the Ockhamist, even though it is up to her whether or not she drinks the orange juice, there is still a truth as to which of the two possible outcomes obtains (as a matter of fact).⁷

But the Peircean rejects the Ockhamistic analysis of “will” and “will not” language. For the Peircean, it makes absolutely no sense at all to say, “Abby will drink orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast,” unless the “will” is interpreted with strong causal force such that the event is no longer contingent. According to the Peircean, the proposition referred to by the utterance, “Abby will drink orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast” cannot presently be true if the event is genuinely contingent. Rather, the Peircean explains that any statements truthfully asserting what will or will not happen in the future do not refer to what will contingently occur, but rather to what will happen of necessity—what is determined—given the state of affairs that has obtained at the time of the assertion in question. Again, the reality to which such a proposition points is presently determined, at least on a Peircean understanding of “will” and “will not” language. Instead of using language that leads to confusion with respect to the status of the future (that is, whether or not it is determined to occur), when referring to future contingents, the Peircean asserts with counterfactual language, “I might drink orange juice tomorrow with my breakfast, but I might not.”⁸

It is this last phrase—“but I might not”—that leads Peirceans to avoid such language.⁹ On the Peircean account, talk of what will or will not occur is to assert with a probability of either 1.0 or 0.0 what is going to happen in the future. For the Peircean, any use of will and will not language in propositions about the future fails to preserve contingency at all. Rather, “will” and “will not” language points to alethic settledness instead of alethic openness. In order to preserve the genuinely contingent nature of future actions, Peirceans deny that it makes sense to speak of what “will” or “will not” happen when discussing future contingents.

Initially, it might appear that a Peircean understanding of the semantic content of PCFCs requires an abandonment of the principle of bivalence. But such is not the case, for all PCFCs using counterfactual language such as “might” and “might not” are bivalently true even if the action in question

has a probability between 0.0 and 1.0. But what of propositions using “will” and “will not” language?

Peirceans contend that all assertions concerning future contingents which employ “will” and “will not” language are false.¹⁰ Call this thesis “all-falsism.” At first, it seems like this leads to an obvious contradiction since this view suggests that “Abby will drink orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast” is false while simultaneously maintaining that it is also false to assert, “Abby will not drink orange juice with her breakfast occur.” However, Peirceans maintain that “will” and “will not” sentences refer to propositions that are not contradictories, but rather are contraries. A Lewisian square of opposition showing how counterfactuals ought to be understood bears this out.

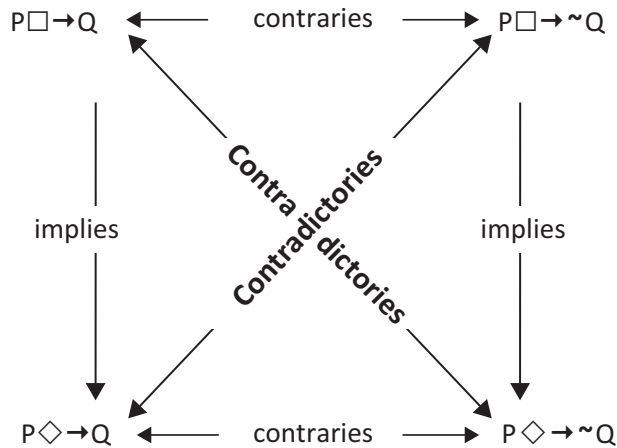


Figure 3.1

On this account (which is endorsed by advocates of OFOT), “would” counterfactuals are represented by $\Box\rightarrow$ whereas “might” counterfactuals are represented by $\Diamond\rightarrow$.¹¹ If Q would obtain given P , then it is false to say that $\sim Q$ might obtain given P . The Peircean semantic takes “will” and “will not” statements to be logically equivalent to would counterfactuals insofar as “will” and “will not” statements should be understood as contraries rather than contradictories.

On the Peircean view, propositions can change in truth-value over time such that at one time something may be false, whereas at another time it may be true. Thus, consider three moments of time, t_1 , t_2 , and t_3 , and let t_3 be the moment at which Abby does or does not drink orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast. According to the Peircean, at t_1 , if Abby’s drinking orange juice tomorrow is genuinely contingent, it is false to assert that she will do so. However, suppose a certain state of affairs obtains at t_2 so as to remove the contingency regarding her drinking orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast (at t_3). Perhaps her character has been so concretized so as to

remove her ability to choose otherwise which wasn't true at t_1 , or perhaps the laws of nature bear on her behavior at t_2 in such a way that necessitates her drinking the orange juice and this wasn't true at t_1 . Regardless of how the contingency is removed, at t_2 it could be true to assert that Abby will drink orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast (at t_3) because at t_2 the event in question would no longer be a future contingent, but rather an action determined to take place in the future. Thus, for the Peircean, one and the same proposition can change truth-value over time.¹²

It's worth mentioning that the Peircean understanding of the semantic content of PCFCs hinges on fairly complicated metaphysical theories, namely, the conjunction of truth-maker theory (which Rhoda ties to the correspondence theory of truth) and metaphysical presentism.¹³ Given such a combination, there are two ways in which one can defend all-falsism. The first supposes that PCFCs actually refer to the future. On presentism, since the future doesn't exist, all PCFCs are false in virtue of reference failure. The second way involves understanding the Peircean semantic's position regarding the determinative force of "will" and "will not" language. Given the way that OFOT insists that future contingents are presently underdetermined, it is false to assert that some future contingent either "will" or "will not" occur. But suppose that issues in philosophy of language are ancillary to what is really at issue. That is, suppose that metaphysical issues involving the nature of time are the fundamental categories upon which everything in the debates concerning the extent of divine foreknowledge turn, at least insofar as OFOT is concerned. How should we think through those issues?

The Metaphysics of Modality, Possible Worlds, and Open Future Open Theism

Does God Know Which Possible World Is the Actual World?

Before discussing the problems in systematic metaphysics required by OFOT, we should note briefly that according to OFOT, there is no such thing as the actual world.¹⁴ This is true for both Tuggyism OFOT (wherein PCFCs lack bivalent truth-values) and for Rhodanian OFOT (wherein all PCFCs involving "will" and "will not" language are false). In standard discourse about possible worlds, a world is a maximally consistent state of affairs.¹⁵ But, on OFOT, there is no actual world because a maximally consistent state of affairs necessarily includes a complete and total world history—including *a future*. After all, bracketing out theological claims that guarantee the existence of future times, there isn't anything logically impossible about the current state of affairs being consistent both with the existence of a future, or with its being consistent with the end of time at whatever moment comes immediately after you conclude reading this sentence. Therefore, the present state of affairs is logically compatible with a great many possible worlds such that, on OFOT, it is impossible to determine which possible world

picks out the actual world. This problem isn't merely a subjective epistemological conundrum, for it applies even to God if OFOT is true, since the lack of ontological status of the future means that there is no actual future, but rather only possible futures. But this renders modal actualism (the view defended by Plantinga) false, for the standard account of a possible world includes a particular future. To restate what seems shocking, given the contingent, open nature of the future on the metaphysics of time and the metaphysics of modality required by OFOT, technically speaking, if there is an actual world, it is not the same as the world that will eventually obtain, and it is very non-standard to think that whichever possible world obtains in the future is a different possible world than the one that obtains presently. Furthermore, on OFOT, God does not know which of many possible worlds God will obtain, leading to the untoward conclusion that God doesn't know which world he has created.¹⁶

This is not to say that we are not real, or that what we perceive to be reality is an illusion. Rather, what I am suggesting is the OFOT requires a deviant understanding of modal metaphysics and a non-standard account of possible world semantics. Therefore, insofar as possible world discourse is required to respond to various issues in philosophical theology and philosophy of religion (e.g., theodicies/defenses against the problem of evil), defenders of OFOT find themselves at a significant disadvantage. Additionally, we should be exceedingly cautious in understanding what advocates of open futurism do and do not mean when they appeal to possible worlds in making distinctions between actuality and possibility, for these thinkers mean something significantly different than what the vast majority of thinkers do when they employ standard semantics regarding the metaphysics of modality in discourse about possible worlds. In fact, it seems that OFOT requires a wholesale revision of modal metaphysics in order to accommodate aberrant notions of what exactly constitutes the real "world." This is all because, according to OFOT, whichever world ends up obtaining in actuality is up to us. Therefore, at the present moment, if anything about the future is genuinely contingent, there is no actual world. Instead, the reality in which we inhabit is perfectly compatible with a great many possible worlds. Again, reality might include time(s) beyond the very instant you read this, (e.g., a future) and reality might not include any time(s) beyond your reading this. On open futurism, reality definitely does not include any times beyond your reading this, though reality may or may not be compatible with there being times beyond your reading this.

It doesn't make sense to speak of a world, even a possible world, as perhaps including times beyond the present, and perhaps not, because each possible world (which is a maximally consistent state of affairs possessing a complete and total world history) is something like a set of true propositions.¹⁷ Furthermore, each possible world is made up of properties essential to that world, properties such as moments of time obtaining beyond your reading this, or the opposite. Hence, no world—not even the actual world

(if there is such a thing)—can be said to lack a given property or its opposite counterpart. Said differently, in each and every possible world, every proposition is either true or false, and the truth or falsity of any given proposition is essential to that respective possible world.¹⁸ As an example, consider that every single possible world either has the property of Abby drinking orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast or Abby *not* drinking orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast, even if the counterpart is a property that a world has because Abby doesn't exist in/at that world.¹⁹

Of course, it isn't uncommon for open theists to utilize standard possible world semantics in working out of whichever version of open theism they defend.²⁰ But standard articulations of the metaphysics of modality simply aren't available for OFOT. In fact, on OFOT, God created the heavens and the earth, but not even God knows which possible world has been actualized.²¹ To illustrate why this is so, recall that on OFOT (and on LFOT, for that matter), agents who enjoy genuine freedom (that is, freedom as understood by libertarians—hereafter LFW) are the cause of their own actions, at least with respect to those actions which are significantly free. If those actions are undetermined, and if the outcome of those actions shapes which possible world is the actual world, then free agents causally determine which world is the actual world, or, more precisely, free agents play a role in casually determining which of the many possible worlds that are presently metaphysically possible best represent reality. In virtue of divine natural knowledge, God enjoys knowledge of all modalities, and therefore knows all of the possible worlds that “could” be, for God knows all possibilities. That is, God knows what will happen if Abby chooses to drink orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast, and God also knows what will happen if Abby refrains from doing so. Call world *alpha* a world in which Abby drinks the orange juice, and call world *beta* a world that is otherwise identical to *alpha*, but in *beta* Abby refrains from drinking orange juice with her breakfast tomorrow. On OFOT, God knows that, presently, both *alpha* and *beta* are possible worlds that might represent reality, but God lacks knowledge as to which “world”/reality will obtain.²²

A very interesting feature of open futurism is that the issue of which world obtains isn't settled until either time ends, or until contingency is removed from everything that presently makes up what we call the future (i.e., determinism becomes true of all future events). In fact, since possible world essentialism offers the most resources in discussing what is or is not a feature of any given world, we should also include modality into the properties of any given world. Therefore, if a state of affairs obtains at time t_1 in some world *alpha* such that at some later time t^* , some event E can either occur or not occur (that is, E is indeterminate), we should note that the possible world that obtains at t_1 is a different world than the one that obtains at t^* when event E either occurs or does not. That is, on open futurism, because time plays such a fundamental role in that metaphysics, the passage of time and the elimination of contingency that stems from accidental necessity entails

that we are constantly moving from occupying one world to a different world.²³ It goes without saying that this highly complicates discussions of endurance, perdurance, and the ontology of where/when/how beings exist across time and across multiple possible worlds. If simplicity is a desiderata of philosophy and theology, as Ockham's razor suggests, we have good reason to reject open futurism for the problems that it creates for other related metaphysical issues.

A (Very) Brief Introduction to Systematic Metaphysics

Systematic metaphysics is systematic theology's philosophical cousin. To better understand the comparison, consider the way that some systematic theologies organize the presentation of Christian doctrine around key themes of the Christian religion. Some systematic theologies involve an organization of key themes around what are perceived to be the more foundational elements of a given tradition's understanding of Christian theology such that certain doctrines push and pull, and drive and influence a thinker's understanding of other doctrines.²⁴ The same idea is present in systematic metaphysics.

In the quest to identify the most foundational elements of a metaphysical system, powers metaphysicians identify common areas that do the pushing and pulling of, for, and in other areas of metaphysics.²⁵ Contemporary systematic metaphysicians agree that four areas are the most foundational elements of any metaphysical system. These four areas are: properties, laws of nature, causation, and modality. The basic idea of systematic metaphysics is that philosophy in general, and metaphysics in particular, is not a buffet from which a person can select at random whatever variety of ideas they wish.²⁶ Instead, there are relations between ideas such that certain views won't hold together.

Even though there are more than two options for each of the four foundational metaphysical categories, let us suppose briefly that each of the four most fundamental aspects of systematic metaphysics each allows for only one of two positions. So, for example, with respect to the laws of nature, suppose that one could hold to a weaker Humean view where the laws merely explain reality, or alternatively, one could hold a stronger view in which the laws of nature actually do some pushing and pulling in determining what happens in the actual world. Suppose also that parallel dualistic conceptions of each of the other three foundational areas in systematic metaphysics exist. Now, suppose that each of the four areas is assigned letters which represent the respective possible options *A* or *B*, *C* or *D*, and so forth. Hence, someone could be an *ACEG*, or perhaps and *ACEH*, or even a *BDFG*, etc., similar to a Myers-Briggs personality test. Systematic metaphysicians maintain that combinations of these four foundational categories of metaphysics determine which positions remain coherent in secondary categories of metaphysics, categories such as the philosophy of time, personal ontology, free will, etc.

For example, in systematic metaphysics, if someone holds to a strong, non-Humean view of laws of nature, together with an understanding of causal determinism that entails the existence of one and only one possible world, it would be inconsistent—nay, incoherent—for that person to defend any conception of free will whereupon agents have the ability to do otherwise. Systematic metaphysicians assert that the combination of more foundational elements (in this case, that person's understanding of the laws of nature and causation) precludes the possibility of a person having the ability to do otherwise.²⁷

Let us now turn to the systematic metaphysics of OFOT. Whatever metaphysics of modality OFOT requires must allow for at least some actions/events to be contingent (namely, those actions for which we are said to have LFW), even if other actions/events are necessary. Any version of the metaphysics of modality entails a particular understanding of possible worlds; that is, possible world theory stems from the metaphysics of modality.²⁸ Now recall also that, on OFOT, free agents play a role in determining which possible world is in fact reality.²⁹ So, OFOT requires that the metaphysics of modality allows for one to exercise power over the actual world. But, OFOT's understanding of the metaphysics of modality (and the theory of possible worlds that flows from it) presents us resources to solve the DFF by way of Ockhamism. Efforts to eliminate such solutions, which would be necessary to preserve adequate motivation for OFOT in the first place, entail a wholesale revision of systematic metaphysics. I now explain why this is the case.

Consider again two possible worlds, *alpha* and *beta*, identical to each other in every way except that in *alpha*, Abby freely drinks orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast, whereas in *beta*, Abby freely refrains from drinking orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast. According to OFOT, in order for Abby to be genuinely free with respect to drinking the orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast, both of these possible worlds must be metaphysically possible. This fits nicely with the metaphysics of modality required by OFOT. But there is nothing incoherent about divine foreknowledge if it is up to Abby whether *alpha* or *beta* obtains. In *alpha*, God infallibly knows that Abby freely drinks the orange juice, whereas in *beta*, God infallibly knows that she freely refrains. Furthermore, we can even say that, given divine foreknowledge, in *alpha* it is consequentially necessary that Abby drinks the orange juice, whereas in *beta* it is consequentially necessary that she refrains from doing so.³⁰ Even this does not pose a problem for divine foreknowledge so long as it is up to Abby whether *alpha* or *beta* obtains.

Defenders of OFOT will likely object that divine foreknowledge of future contingents precludes the ability of agents to determine whether *alpha* or *beta* obtains, for such an ability amounts to power over the past. But this is mistaken. In *alpha*, God has always believed that Abby would drink the orange juice, and in *beta*, God has always believed that she would refrain. The ability to causally determine whether *alpha* or *beta* obtains in no way allows for changing the past, because the past is part of a complete and

total world history, and is therefore indexed to a particular possible world. If Abby brings it about that *alpha* is the actual world, then Abby brings it about that God has always believed that she would drink the orange juice. Similarly, if Abby brings it about that *beta* is the actual world, then she bring it about that God has always believed that she would refrain from drinking the orange juice. Thus, given the metaphysics of modality required by OFOT (and the theory of possible worlds that stems from it), a person's power to determine which possible world represents reality allows for what I call "possible world Ockhamism." Possible world Ockhamism differs from any version of Ockhamism that involves power over the past, or even counterfactual power over the past.³¹

At this juncture, defenders of OFOT will likely object that I've missed the point of the principle of the fixity of the past with respect to which possible worlds are metaphysically available. On OFOT, the only possible worlds that are metaphysically available are worlds that share a complete and total world history up to the present moment.³² That is, the future is causally open in a way that the past is not. Modality does not reduce simply to the two categories of contingent and necessary. Rather, the metaphysics of modality required by OFOT is linked to an understanding of time that affirms the fixity of the past. The results of this combination of modality and time yield versions of necessity that involve time, such as accidental necessity, which itself rests upon the principle of the fixity of the past.³³ Furthermore, there are other types of necessity, such as the view that some event in the future (which doesn't yet exist on a presentist ontology) is necessary in virtue of present realities which determine a given outcome (e.g., metaphysical necessity, ontological necessity, consequential necessity, etc.). But why should anyone adopt such a view when possible world Ockhamism allows for a type of theological compatibilism to navigate around the tensions raised by the DFF? To see how possible world Ockhamism helps in avoiding open theism as a response to the DFF, consider a parallel argument offered by David Lewis for the compatibility of determinism and a libertarian conception of free will.

Lewis maintained that if the laws of nature causally determine what an agent will choose, it is still within the agent's power to choose to do otherwise. Of course, her choosing to do otherwise entails that she exercises counterfactual power over the laws of nature such that the laws of nature would be different than they in fact are if she, in fact, does otherwise.³⁴ A great many philosophers find this claim far from obvious and go further in asserting that Lewis's argument requires a Humean view of the laws of nature, which many philosophers maintain is not in keeping with a common sense understanding of what the laws of nature are. Regardless of whether or not Lewis's argument is persuasive, his argument rests on the idea that we enjoy counterfactual power over the laws of nature. For Lewis, this isn't a problem, because counterfactual power is weaker than actual power, so he is able to avoid straightforward contradiction.

Now, to consider the parallel, recall that on OFOT, we do not merely enjoy the weaker counterfactual power over which possible world obtains. No, on OFOT humans possess actual power to determine which possible world obtains. If humans really possess this power, which is entailed by the metaphysics of modality required by OFOT to be coherent at all (and the theory of possible “worlds” that flows from that metaphysics of modality), why should anyone believe that the only worlds that are metaphysically available must share an identical world history? Remember, there is no such thing as an actual world on OFOT, and we play a part in causally determining which of many possible worlds becomes the actual world. Hence, there is no good reason to deny possible world Ockhamism as a solution to the DFF, *even if we affirm the principle of the fixity of the past*. If a person’s actions determine which world is real, there is no problem with affirming that in *alpha* it has always been the case that God believed that Abby would freely drink the orange juice, and that in *beta* it has always been the case that God believed that Abby would not drink the orange juice. If it is up to Abby whether or not she drinks the orange juice (that is to say, Abby enjoys LFW with respect to drinking the orange juice), then Abby’s decision determines whether *alpha* or *beta* is the actual world, and thereby determines what God has always believed without impugning the principle of the fixity of the past.³⁵

Defenders of OFOT will almost certainly dismiss this solution, insisting that possible world Ockhamism still fails to take seriously the fundamentality of time and the principle of the fixity of the past. On a certain reading of the metaphysics of modality and the theory of possible worlds that stems from it, I am willing to grant such a claim. If defenders of OFOT were to claim that time is so fundamental an aspect of reality, and were they to assert also that presentism requires that the only possible worlds that are metaphysically available at any given time t^* share an identical world history up to and including time t^* , then one could argue that possible world Ockhamism fails.³⁶ However, such an admission requires the advocate of OFOT to assert that time is more fundamental to systematic metaphysics than modality *simpliciter*, for the nature of time helps determine the metaphysics of modality (and OFOT’s view of possible worlds) that undergird OFOT.

Obviously, this amounts to a radical departure from the majority opinion among systematic metaphysicians. Such a move requires the addition of time as a fifth category of systematic metaphysics alongside properties, causation, the laws of nature, and modality. In fact, it seems that time isn’t merely a fifth category, but rather is something more foundational to metaphysics than modality and causation, for the nature of time, according to OFOT, is the basis for any understanding of whatever the actual “world”/reality is, what types of causation can and cannot obtain, and what the nature of im/possibility is in reality (i.e., the metaphysics of modality). Can anyone offer a systematic metaphysics that make time more foundational to reality than modality and causation? Could such a project succeed? In a word,

maybe. Open theism is a relatively new research project, so it remains to be seen whether such a reformulation provides a coherent expression of reality, or whether it exchanges one set of problems for another larger, more complex set of (insurmountable?) problems. Suffice it to say that if defenders of open theism, especially open future varieties thereof, need to provide a coherent account of the metaphysics that make possible such a non-traditional view of God and reality in order to make sure that the project is viable in the first place. At this juncture, at least three points deserve further attention.

First, if OFOT allows for the use of possible world discourse at all (and especially as it concerns the metaphysics of modality), then OFOT needs to provide some explanation of what reality is. Of course, in order to make sense of any such claims, whatever reality turns out to be needs to be cashed out in terms of standard possible world discourse semantics. If OFOT cannot provide such an account, we should first recognize that an even more radical departure from systematic metaphysics is necessary even beyond what I have already shown is required—namely, one that involves a wholesale revision of possible world-based metaphysics of modality.³⁷

Third, let us suppose that the sort of revisions that OFOT requires for systematic metaphysics in general and the metaphysics of modality in particular (and whatever theory of possible worlds that stems from that metaphysics of modality) somehow renders possible world Ockhamism unsuccessful and thereby saves OFOT from various defeaters. Even if these revisions can accomplish all this (a claim that is far from obvious and certainly yet to be demonstrated), OFOT remains saddled with other problems. Perhaps philosophers should pay more attention to time as a fundamental metaphysical category; perhaps all the work in powers metaphysics to date is mistaken in denying that time is fundamental because the nature of time itself is contingent; perhaps time is necessary for the metaphysics of modality to properly appropriate both the metaphysical category of causation and alternative versions of necessity (such as accidental necessity, ontological necessity, and consequential necessity discussed in chapter 5). Even still, it seems that OFOT must choose between two horns of a dilemma.

The first horn leaves open theism unmotivated because there is a way God could infallibly know which possible world will eventually correspond to the actual world without such knowledge hinging on the sort of necessity that compromises LFW. This is because the type of necessity that distributes from “Necessarily, (If God knows x , then x)” to the corresponding conditional “If God necessarily knows x , then necessarily x ” gives us a false antecedent. Allow me to explain.

On any version of the metaphysics of modality that is consistent with both theism and a theory of possible worlds such that more than one possible world is metaphysically available (i.e., more than one possible world could obtain, and there are real differences between those worlds), it is obviously false that God necessarily knows whatever God would need to know of necessity in order to motivate strong forms of the DFF. Said differently,

it is obviously false that God, as part of divine free knowledge, necessarily (in the broadly logical sense) knows something *as part of the actual world*. That is, even though God has knowledge of all modalities as part of divine natural knowledge, and necessarily so, God does not necessarily know (in the broadly logical sense) which possible world is the actual world as a part of divine free knowledge.³⁸ This is all the more true given that OFOT entails denying that there is an actual world (on the standard semantics of discourse about possible worlds in which a possible world is a maximally consistent state of affairs with a complete and total world history, including a future). On possible world Ockhamism, there are a great many worlds in which God, instead of knowing x , knows $\sim x$.³⁹

This obviously generalizes over matters concerning future contingency such that in *alpha*, God knows some given future contingent which renders an event such as Abby's freely drinking orange juice tomorrow with her breakfast consequentially necessary, and in *beta* God knows the corresponding counterpart, thereby making it consequentially necessary that Abby freely refrain from drinking the orange juice. This is all that is needed to show that it is false to assert that "Necessarily (in all possible worlds), God knows x ." Therefore, the conditional used by OFOT to motivate the DFF is vacuously true because it has a false antecedent, which, in turn, eliminates any strength to the form of the DFF by rendering the argument unsound.

And this brings us to the second horn of the dilemma that defenders of OFOT face. Regardless of which of the various weaker conceptions of necessity defenders of OFOT use to rescue their arguments for theological incompatibilism, open theists are against the ropes, for these varieties of ontological necessity either allow for an escape for theological compatibilists (such as possible world Ockhamism, or perhaps some other response to the DFF), or create insurmountable problems for the open theist, namely, that God cannot know the present.⁴⁰

That God cannot know the present if open theism is true raises even more serious problems for OFOT than it does for LFOT. Recall that defenders of LFOT are content to redefine omniscience in modal terms such that, according to these thinkers, God does not need to know all truths in order to count as omniscient. But this is not the case for OFOT. Defenders of OFOT defend the thesis that truth supervenes upon being (TSB), and because the future doesn't exist on presentism, it poses no problem for robust articulations of omniscience that God lacks knowledge of which future contingents "will*" obtain.⁴¹ For both Tuggyists and Rhodanians, no such truths exist, and for Rhodanians, all PCFCs are false. However, neither of these options are available with respect to present realities, for clearly the present exists on presentism, so there are true bivalent truth-values for propositions about the present. But, on the reformulations in the systematic metaphysics of modality (and the theory of possible worlds that stems from it) of OFOT required to avoid possible world Ockhamism, it turns out that God cannot know

certain truths that do exist, namely, accidentally necessary truths about the present that involve free will.

Finally, let us continue supposing (apart from any supporting evidence) that all of the radical revisioning of systematic metaphysics succeeds against each argument I've offered, including the issues of necessity just mentioned, OFOT suffers from massive confusion with regard to its conflating temporal modality with metaphysical modality.⁴² Although the two concepts might be related,⁴³ contemporary philosophers of time all agree that one cannot simply substitute metaphysical modality for temporal modality, nor can one switch back and forth between the two as though they express the same concepts. The relationship(s) between/among the metaphysics of modality, temporal modality, modal logic, tense logic, and the metaphysics of time are extremely complicated. For too long, open theists in general, and defenders of OFOT in particular, have rested on (an) assumed philosophical system(s) that is/are far from obvious.

Put simply, the systematic metaphysics that open theism requires has yet to be adequately developed, and might not even be tenable at all. For all we know, no such metaphysics exists, for whatever would be required to make sense of OFOT might be self-referentially incoherent. I am not suggesting this is the case, but no one can make this judgment until a philosophical system is developed and put forward. When confronted by these sorts of calls for a systematic metaphysics that makes sense of open futurism advocates of OFOT have responded by talking about how intuitive open futurism is to everyday people in much the same way that they affirm LFW. Insofar as systematic metaphysics is concerned, when defenders of OFOT have responded at all, they have done so in an ad hoc manner about which of a number of metaphysical commitments OFOT affirms and rejects. If I have accomplished nothing else, I hope that I have exposed the need for defenders of OFOT to develop a much more thorough account of systematic metaphysics that makes sense of their claims while simultaneously providing adequate metaphysical motivation to eliminate and avoid alternative proposed solutions to the DFF (such as possible world Ockhamism).

On the Modality of Open Future Open Theism's Metaphysics of Modality

It seems rather strange that defenders of OFOT would on the one hand want to suggest that time is such a fundamental aspect of reality so as to require rethinking all of systematic metaphysics while simultaneously suggesting that time itself is what precludes divine knowledge of certain truths. That is, these two suggestions don't intuitively fit well with the Anselmian conception of divine maximal greatness. Rather, what fits more neatly with the Anselmian thesis is that since the nature of time itself is contingent, whatever metaphysics of time God chooses to instantiate should lend support to the maximal knowledge argument instead of raising any tensions for it. Of course, this

doesn't constitute a proof against OFOT, but it does raise a worry, which, together with the other arguments I've offered, tends toward a cumulative case argument against OFOT.

Recall that defenders of OFOT will likely retort that I've failed to realize that God's knowledge is still no different, for as long as God is essentially omniscient, then it doesn't matter whether or not what God knows falls under divine natural knowledge or divine free knowledge. If God knows all the truth-values of PCFCs for all possible worlds, then it doesn't impugn divine omniscience that God lacks a type of knowledge because God created an open future world and not some other world in which God could know truths about the future. It may be the case that true truth-values for PCFCs don't exist in this world, but this does not amount to a limitation on divine knowledge any more than God's decision to actualize a world in which some uncreated person doesn't exist as a concrete particular amounts to a limitation of divine omniscience since God lacks free knowledge of this uncreated person.

The response above saves OFOT from being defeated on entirely Anselmian grounds, and it would count as a strong defense of OFOT if it were possible for God to create a world in which God lacked knowledge of an entire category of truths available to God in other worlds. However, because divine omniscience is an essential and not accidental or contingent property of God, defenders of OFOT should take seriously the idea that the type of possible world in which OFOT is true might be metaphysically impossible, or infeasible for God (that is, worlds in which both metaphysical presentism is true and agents enjoy LFW). God exists necessarily (i.e., in/at all possible worlds), and in all those worlds God is omniscient, and maximally so. Thus, in all worlds, God possesses the maximum amount of knowledge God could possibly have. Ultimately, the reason that God cannot create the type of world demanded by OFOT is because such a world is a state of affairs in which God's knowledge is limited because of a decision to create a world in which presentism is true and agents enjoy LFW. If such a decision requires any limitation on the part of God, then such a decision is logically impossible for a metaphysically perfect being. The reason for this is that such would entail ontological kenosis, which is logically impossible since great making attributes are essential to the divine nature.

Tom Crisp, one of the leading defenders of metaphysical presentism, has argued compellingly that presentism is a contingent truth.⁴⁴ Thus, because presentism isn't a necessary truth concerning the metaphysics of time, it follows that if presentism (together with Anselmian perfect being theology and LFW) entails OFOT, and if OFOT is a limitation of divine knowledge, then such worlds are metaphysically impossible, given the Anselmian conception of divine maximal greatness. Because any self-limitation of God is self-referentially incoherent, the idea that God would create a universe which entails that God does not possess exhaustive knowledge of what will* happen in the future is unacceptable. Of course, this problem is exacerbated

all the more when we consider that there are good reasons to think that presentism, if true at all, is contingently true. Therefore, alternative conceptions of time must be considered genuine metaphysical possibilities available for God that preserve exhaustive definite foreknowledge. Furthermore, there are still other alternatives that include presentism coupled together with alternative conceptions of human freedom (viz., compatibilism, semi-compatibilism, or other conceptions of LFW which don't demand PAP).

I am not suggesting that God lacks freedom with respect to what sort of world God could instantiate. That is, I'm not arguing that God needed to create a world in which B-series views of time were instantiated, for this would make any A-theory of time (including presentism) metaphysically impossible.⁴⁵ Rather, I am arguing that presentism, together with theological incompatibilism about freedom and foreknowledge, once properly understood, entails a counterintuitive approach to divine omniscience, even if it doesn't entail any divine self-limitation, strictly speaking. I don't know of any Anselmian who doesn't specialize in freedom and foreknowledge issues who would intuitively think that God lacks knowledge of which future contingents will* and will not* obtain when initially considering all that falls under the domain of divine omniscience. Of course, OFOT only makes sense if presentism renders impossible any truths about future contingents.⁴⁶ Such an analysis does not mean that God limits the scope of divine knowledge directly by simply choosing to not know truths about PCFC in the way that some theologians have suggested.⁴⁷ However, the fact that all PCFC are false on OFOT is determined by something else under God's control, namely, God's decision of what type of time to actualize. Thus, if OFOT follows from the conjunction of presentism and LFW, what would otherwise be intuitively affirmed as part of divine omniscience is limited indirectly by the decision to instantiate a particular metaphysics of time together with a particular metaphysics of free will. As has now been demonstrated, this is so counterintuitive that defenders of OFOT need to offer accounts of why God would make such a choice, and they need to provide a systematic metaphysics to make sense of all this, and show how it does not amount to any sort of divine self-limitation—or, alternatively, offer compelling arguments for the necessity of presentism. But even if all this could be done, there are other theological reasons that one shouldn't endorse OFOT. Let's consider one of them.

A Theological Defeater for Open Future Open Theism

Although OFOT might not be defeated on Anselmian grounds alone, this doesn't mean that there aren't any good theological arguments against it. OFOT doesn't fit with traditionally accepted views about seemingly unrelated matters in Christian doctrine. Before I show why this is the case, let me make a few observations about the metaphysics of free will as understood by a libertarian. Suppose that some event *E* is counterfactually dependent on some action *A* such that if *A*, then *E*, and if $\sim A$, then $\sim E$. Given any version of open

theism, if A or $\sim A$ is underdetermined (that is, if A is contingent), then God cannot know whether A or $\sim A$. But, it follow from this that neither can God know whether E or $\sim E$, for E is likewise contingent since E remains counterfactually dependent on A , and A is underdetermined. But, in Scripture we find examples of divine knowledge of future contingents that are counterfactually dependent on the free choices of human agents, and nothing about this changes even if we assume a libertarian understanding of moral responsibility.

Numerous biblical texts could serve to fill in for the variables I've laid out in the argument above, but I will focus on just one. In a passage known as the Olivet Discourse—a passage that has been hotly debated as it concerns not only eschatological themes but also Christological controversies—Jesus makes it unequivocally clear that neither angels, nor humans, nor even Jesus himself knows when Christ will return. But Jesus also makes it unequivocally clear that the Father does know both the day and the hour that this event will come to pass. However, the same passage also asserts that the *parousia* is counterfactually dependent upon the completion of the Great Commission. In the immediate context of this surprising assertion, Jesus had just proclaimed that “the Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, *and then the end will come*.”⁴⁸ We know from numerous other texts that Christians bear moral responsibility for evangelism, that is, the proclamation and spread of the Gospel (cf. Ezekiel 3:18 and 33:8; Matthew 28:19–20; and Acts 20:26–27). To make things even clearer, that the *parousia* is counterfactually dependent upon human actions is reaffirmed by the apostle Peter when he makes it clear that we are to labor not only in actively waiting on the day of God, but we actually play a part in hastening its arrival (2 Peter 3:11–12). Given a *prima facie* reading of 2 Peter 3, the day and the hour of Christ's return is presently contingent, for it is counterfactually dependent on human obedience to the Great Commission. However, Jesus plainly asserts that this contingent future event is known by God the Father. Is there a way that open theists can make sense of such a counter-example to their beliefs?⁴⁹

Perhaps open theists could retort that God has set up a contingency plan just in case humans, by their disobedience, fail to fulfill the conditions necessary for the *parousia* to occur by some given time. They might even cite texts in the book of Revelation that seem to indicate that angelic beings will preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth prior to the consummation of all things. But even if those apocalyptic texts should be understood along those lines of interpretation, such does not alleviate the tensions created by a proper interpretation of Matthew 24. The “end” that is to come upon the completion of the task of the proclamation of the Gospel to all nations in Matthew 24 is not the consummation of all things, but rather is more properly interpreted as the beginning of the end, as the context makes clear.⁵⁰ Hence, appeal to alternative schematics to explain divine foreknowledge of one specific future contingent, namely, the *parousia*, fails to account for the way that the context of the pericope in question makes clear that *humans* are the agents that bring

about these things. Apart from some divine decree that renders certain future events not contingent, but determined, I fail to see how an open theist can account for divine (fore)knowledge of the time of the *parousia*. Of course, appealing to the determination of said event won't satisfy a broadly openness hermeneutic, whereupon a divine command obviously necessitates human responsibility, which, in turn, requires significant freedom and the ability to do otherwise. Left without any alternative responses to this conundrum, I conclude that divine knowledge of the day and the hour of the return of the Son (and other contingent events that are counterfactually dependent on actions for which we bear moral responsibility) constitutes a powerful theological defeater for all versions of open theism, including OFOT.

Conclusion

In this essay, I began by offering a nomenclature of various articulations of open theism as well as a taxonomy to aid readers in differentiating between these different versions of open theism. As I argued against two different versions of OFOT, I repeatedly sought to charitably grant various presuppositions to defenders of OFOT for the sake of argument. It's worth mentioning again that the easiest way to defeat OFOT is to deny presentism, for without this metaphysics of time, OFOT doesn't even get off the ground. However, in order to avoid being too simplistic, I went on to explain how Rhodanian OFOT differs from its Tuggyism counterpart. After discussing issues in systematic metaphysics that are pertinent to OFOT, I noted that defenders of OFOT need to provide a coherent metaphysical system before we can take the position seriously, for the whole project seems to be improperly motivated by an account of time being more fundamental to reality than the metaphysics of modality. I concluded by arguing against OFOT by raising a theological conundrum against it. All told, OFOT might be compatible with Anselmian perfect being theology, but there are other philosophical and theological reasons that it should be rejected.

Notes

1. But note that for open future open theists who affirm divine knowledge of all truths, it is vacuously true that God knows all that it is logically possible to know.
2. Cf. John Randolph Lucas, *The Future: An Essay on God, Temporality, and Truth* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Richard L. Purtill, "Fatalism and the Omnitemporality of Truth," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 185–192; Dale Tuggy, "Three Roads to Open Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (January 2007): 28–51; and Dean W. Zimmerman, "The A-Theory of Time, Presentism, and Open Theism," in *Science and Religion in Dialogue*, ed. Melville Stewart (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 791–809.
3. Although both Tuggyism and Rhodanian versions of OFOT affirm theological incompatibilism—the belief that divine foreknowledge is incompatible with free will—advocates of OFOT motivate their understandings of open theism by way of the metaphysics of time rather than strictly as a response to the dilemma of

freedom and foreknowledge (DFF). However, proponents of OFOT agree with the arguments for the incompatibility of freedom and foreknowledge.

4. Rhoda's published work on OFOT includes: "Generic Open Theism and Some Varieties Thereof," *Religious Studies* 44 (2008): 225–234; "The Philosophical Case for Open Theism," *Philosophia* 35 (2007): 301–311; "The Fivefold Openness of the Future," in *God in an Open Universe: Science, Metaphysics, and Open Theism*, eds. William Hasker, Thomas Jay Oord, and Dean Zimmerman (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 69–93. He also co-authored with Greg Boyd and Thomas Belt the article "Open Theism, Omniscience, and the Nature of the Future," *Faith and Philosophy* 23 (2006): 432–459.
5. The two other scholars that figure most prominently in this school of open theism are Greg Boyd and Patrick Todd.
6. Describing the various options in the philosophy of time is an incredibly difficult task facing contemporary metaphysicians, especially when writing for non-specialists. Unfortunately, a deep investigation into such would take us too far afield of the central thrust of this project, so I must unfortunately presuppose that the reader is generally aware of contemporary work on the philosophy of time, at least since McTaggart first introduced the distinction between what he labeled the A-series and the B-series. For non-specialists on the issues, I recommend Thomas M. Crisp, "Presentism," and Michael C. Rea, "Four-Dimensionalism," both in *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, eds. Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 211–245 and 246–280, respectively. For more on presentism in particular, I highly recommend the collection of essays in *Presentism: Essential Readings*, eds. Ernan Magalhaes and L. Nathan Oaklander (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2010); Craig Bourne, *A Future for Presentism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006); and the essays by Dean Zimmerman noted in footnote three.

It's also worth mentioning that, presumably, the same semantics would hold for the growing block theory of time, but in light of Trenton Merricks's rather devastating critique of it, and also because no open theists to date defend growing blockism, I pay no attention to that view here. Cf. Trenton Merricks, "Good-Bye Growing Block," in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, Vol. 2., ed. Dean Zimmerman (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 103–110.

7. How this fact obtains is rather controversial, especially given presentism, such that there is no future. These worries are raised by Rhoda et al. in "Open Theism, Omniscience, and the Nature of the Future."
8. Of course, synonyms for "might" or "might not" will work just as well, as will adverbial modification to "will" and "will not" language, even when those synonyms and/or adverbial modification denote strong probabilities, so long as they do not raise the probability to 1.0, which would eliminate the contingency of the future by making it situationally, even if not metaphysically or logically, necessary. So, for example, statements like "I will almost certainly drink orange juice tomorrow with my breakfast" still count as PCFCs, according to the Peircean, while pure Ockhamistic assertions about the future do not count as PCFCs, but rather as propositions concerning actions presently determined to occur in the future.
9. Note that on any Ockhamistic interpretation of PCFCs that use "will" or "will not" language, it makes perfect sense to say, "Abby will drink the orange juice tomorrow, but she might not." Peirceans find such an assertion deeply confused.
10. Building on work originally put forward by A.N. Prior, Amy Seymour has recently begun to defend this idea, which she calls all-falsism. See her, "The Advantages of All-falsism," Unpublished paper presented at the *Society of Christian Philosophers' Pacific Regional Meeting*, Westmont University, Santa Barbara, CA, January 14, 2012. Cf. A.N. Prior, *Past, Present, and Future* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1967); and his *Papers on Time and Tense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

11. This figure is taken from J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 53. It represents the views of David Lewis as expressed in his *Counterfactuals* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1973).
12. Of course, any view which denies the omnitemporality of truth faces an uphill battle. Rhoda, Boyd, and Belt discuss this in their article "Open Theism, Omniscience, and the Nature of the Future." However, I won't discuss those issues here for two reasons. First, the omnitemporality of truth has been defended by the vast majority of philosophers throughout history, and I tend to agree with what has already been written in response to detractors elsewhere. But secondly, in order to strengthen the key arguments I put forward in this chapter, I want to assume for the sake of argument that the Peircean understanding of the semantic content of PCFCs is correct.
13. None of these views enjoy unanimous support from academic scholars, whether philosophers or theologians, much less the combination of all of them. Nonetheless, I will continue assuming these views in the spirit of charity, not least because both philosophical and theological defenses of each of these positions have been offered by leading academic figures.
14. Dale Tuggy acknowledges as much in his "Three Roads to Open Theism." Additionally, in personal conversation, Alan Rhoda has confirmed that he shares this view. To be perfectly clear, on this point nothing hinges on whether one understands "actual" in a technical sense as did Lewis such that which world is actual is merely a world-indexed property.
15. This is true regardless of which position one takes in regards to the debate in the metaphysics of modality over the ontological status of possible worlds. So, for Plantinga (who represents a view known as modal actualism) as much as for Lewis (a modal concretist), a possible world necessarily includes a complete and total world history. Cf. Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1974), and David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001).
16. To understand more clearly why this is so, see Rhoda, "The Fivefold Openness of the Future."
17. It won't do for the defender of OFOT to say that the set of true propositions that accurately describe the actual world doesn't include any propositions about the free future. Consider the following proposition: <Possibly, Jones cuts his grass tomorrow>. If Jones is free with respect to cutting his grass tomorrow, then this expresses a true proposition about the free future.
18. The open theist might object that this begs the question against any version of open theism that denies the principle of bivalence. Were someone to argue in this way, two replies are in order. First, there are independent reasons for rejecting the rejection of the principle of bivalence that I've already canvassed. Second, the metaphysics of modality and the semantics of possible worlds that I am using is considered the standard approach. For anyone who wishes to employ a non-standard account of modality and possible worlds discourse, we are owed an explanation of why the standard understandings won't work, and we are owed an accounting of what alternative is being offered. The argument that, on OFOT, the standard understandings won't work makes headway, but the alternative understanding where a possible world simply refers to the set of all fixed/determined truths fails to do justice to the most robust accounts of modal metaphysics offered by contemporary philosophers. To my knowledge, no alternative analysis of possible worlds and modal metaphysics has been developed which satisfies our intuitions about the proper way to describe not only the way things are, but captures a complete a total world history (including the future).
19. I won't engage the discussion of the difference between existing in or at a given world, for such a discussion has no bearing on the points I make in this chapter. For those interested in those matters, see Robert M. Adams, "Theories of

- Actualty," *Noûs* 8 (1974): 211–221; and idem., "Actualty and Thisness," *Synthese* 49 (1981): 3–41.
20. This is especially true when open theists of both the LFOT camp and the OFOT camp begin to delve into issues of divine providence, and all the more when dealing with the problem of evil. See William Hasker, *Providence, Evil, and the Openness of God* (London: Routledge, 2004); and idem., *The Triumph of God Over Evil: Theodicy for a World of Suffering* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).
21. The same can be said for LFOT, but Hasker, Swinburne, and van Inwagen (because they affirm that future contingents are presently true) can say that there is such a thing as the actual world. Hence, God created the actual world, but God isn't sure which of all the possible worlds is the actual one. At this juncture, it is worth mentioning that an open theistic doctrine of creation, on both LFOT and OFOT, bears a significant amount of similarity to that of process theology, despite how much open theists might wish it weren't so.
22. Note also that God cannot know which world will obtain, for the causal force of "will" on the Peircean semantic eliminates the contingency at issue, as discussed above.
23. This problem that I raise is something that stems from the modal anti-realism that rises from open futurism. See Daniel Kodaj, "Open Future and Modal Anti-Realism," *Philosophical Studies* 168, no. 2 (2014): 417–438.
24. To consider but one contemporary example, see Michael Horton's four-volume series on covenantal dogmatics: *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (2002); *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (2005); *Covenant and Salvation: Union With Christ* (2007); *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (2008), all from Westminster/John Knox Press in Louisville, KY.
25. The key figures in contemporary systematic metaphysicians are David Armstrong, Alexander Bird, Jonathan Jacobs, Alexander Pruss, and the late David Lewis. Depending on who one is talking to, a few other names might be added into this group, notably Peter van Inwagen and E.J. Lowe. Of course, there are a great many other philosophers who have significant things to say about the individual areas that comprise systematic metaphysics. The names I've listed here are those who work on systematizing these other areas of metaphysics.
26. The most accessible introduction to systematic metaphysics is D.M. Armstrong's *Sketch for a Systematic Metaphysics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010). This is a condensed version of his elaborate metaphysical system which he works out in much greater detail in *A World of States of Affairs*, Cambridge Studies in Philosophy (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
27. Of course, there are also relations between the foundational aspects of systematic metaphysics and not merely to the ways in which these more foundational elements impact other areas of metaphysics. For example, it is difficult to see how the metaphysics of modality could be anything except deterministic if the laws of nature and causation were as described above, *unless* the laws of nature and the nature of causation were themselves contingent.
28. I've already mentioned Plantinga's *The Nature of Necessity* and Lewis's *On the Plurality of Worlds*. For more on the metaphysics of modality and how possible world theory stems from it, see John Divers, *Possible Worlds* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002); Michael J. Loux, ed., *The Possible and the Actual: Readings in the Metaphysics of Modality* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979); Alvin Plantinga, *Essays in the Metaphysics of Modality*, ed. Matthew Davidson (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Alexander R. Pruss, *Actuality, Possibility, and Worlds* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2011).
29. Again, it is tempting to say that free agents play a part in determining which world is the actual world, but on OFOT there is no such thing as the actual

- world. Hence, I use the term “reality” to denote what would normally be called the actual world.
30. Recall that consequential necessity is the special type of ontological necessity that follows from a given state of affairs arising. Recall also that William Alston sometimes referred to this same notion as S-logical necessity to denote the kind of logical necessity that follows given a particular situation.
 31. Cf. Mark D. Linville, “Divine Foreknowledge and the Libertarian Conception of Human Freedom,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 33 (1993): 165–186. In this article, Linville lays out an inchoate version of possible world Ockhamism, but he fails to adequately pursue the nuanced differences between possible world Ockhamism and traditional Ockhamistic accounts of counterfactual power over the past.
 32. Perhaps this is what the diagrams are intended to communicate in Rhoda, Boyd, and Belt, “Open Theism, Omniscience, and the Nature of the Future.” Unfortunately for them, these diagrams conflate the ontology of existence (on presentism) with the metaphysics of A-theory, an issue that Craig and Hunt raise and explain in great detail in William Lane Craig and David P. Hunt, “Perils of the Open Road,” *Faith and Philosophy* 30, 1 (2013): 49–71. Robert Kane, who I am told is an open theist (but of which variety I’m not sure), calls this the “garden of forking paths,” and insists that it is necessary to preserve free will. Cf. Robert Kane, “Libertarianism,” in John Martin Fischer, Robert Kane, Derk Pereboom, and Manuel Vargas, *Four Views on Free Will* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 5–43.
 33. To be clear, this is not unique to OFOT, or even open theism in general.
 34. David Lewis, “Are We Free to Break the Laws?” *Theoria* 47 (1981): 113–121.
 35. Defenders of OFOT will retort that when they speak of the fixity of the past, they mean to imply that it is now impossible for Abby now to determine what God believed in the past. But this is no worry, for Abby has no such power on possible world Ockhamism. God always believed in *alpha* that Abby would drink orange juice, and God always believed in *beta* that Abby would refrain from drinking orange juice. And, it is within Abby’s power to bring it about that *alpha*, or that *beta*, obtains.
 36. Of course, the success of such an argument would hinge on a rejection of a distinction between hard facts and soft facts, as well as other arguments against divine timelessness. But these two things together lend an incredible amount of support to possible world Ockhamism, and, to date, have not been defeated (at least by consensus opinion of academic philosophers). Cf. Jeffrey Green and Katherin Rogers, “Time, Foreknowledge, and Alternative Possibilities,” *Religious Studies* 48 (June 2012): 151–164; Katherin Rogers, “The Necessity of the Present and Anselm’s Eternalist Response to the Problem of Theological Fatalism,” *Religious Studies* 43, no. 1 (March 2007): 25–47; idem., “Omniscience, Eternity, and Freedom,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (December 1996): 399–412; Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity,” *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429–458; Stump and Kretzmann, “Eternity, Awareness, and Action,” *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992): 463–482; and Kevin Timpe, “Truth-Making and Divine Eternity,” *Religious Studies* (2007): 299–315. For the most recent work that comes close to offering a dissenting view by arguing against traditional Ockhamism (but fails to deal with possible world Ockhamism), see Patrick Todd, “Prepunishment and Explanatory Dependence: A New Argument for Incompatibilism About Freedom and Foreknowledge,” *Philosophical Review* 122, no. 4 (October 2013): 619–639.
 37. One way this could happen is found in Jonathan Jacobs, “A Powers Theory of Modality: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Reject Possible Worlds,”

Philosophical Studies 151, no. 2 (2010): 227–248. But, Jacobs isn't an open theist, and his view of modality will not allow for OFOT.

38. Here I am assuming modal actualism. If one were to adopt a Lewisian view of modal concretism, whereupon all possible worlds are real not just as divine ideas or abstractions, but as concrete particulars, what I am suggesting would be false, for it would be much more difficult to distinguish between divine natural knowledge and divine free knowledge on such an ontology.
39. The same is true *mutatis mutandis* for defenders of LFOT such as Hasker, who denies that God is a necessary being.
40. Space precludes giving the detailed argument for this conclusion. To see why God cannot know the present on open theism, see my "When Does God Learn? Open Theism, Simultaneous Causation, and Divine Knowledge of the Present," in *God, Mind, Knowledge*, ed. Andrew Moore (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), 103–120.
41. Here I use "will*" in an attempt to charitably explain the contingent nature of what is at issue. It's worth mentioning again that a solution to these problems can be found in denying TSB by appropriating arguments that Trenton Merricks makes in *Truth and Ontology*. Such a move would help OFOT avoid some of the problems that I raise, but the same move eliminates much of the motivation for OFOT in the first place.
42. Cf. William Lane Craig and David Hunt, "The Perils of the Open Road," *Faith and Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (January 2013): 49–71, as well as Ulrich Meyer's very helpful essay "Time and Modality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Time*, ed. Craig Callender (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 91–121.
43. It is a disputed matter as to what relation temporal modality has with metaphysical modality. For an account of similarity, see A.A. Rini and M.J. Cresswell, *The World-Time Parallel: Tense and Modality in Logic and Metaphysics* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Cf. also Meyer, "Time and Modality".
44. For more on the contingent nature of presentism, see Crisp, "Presentism."
45. Nor am I endorsing Ted Sider's arguments that presentism is necessarily false, although I do find them rather persuasive. Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), especially 11–52.
46. As noted in footnote 414, Tom Crisp has argued compellingly against this by offering an ersatz way around the problem. Therefore, Crisp disagrees with Rhoda *et al* that presentism, when conjoined with LFW, entails all-falsism. See Crisp, "Presentism and the Grounding Objection," *Noûs* 41 (2007): 90–109. Of course, if presentism is false (a view that I defend), none of this matters.
47. Consider Clark Pinnock's view that God chooses to limit divine knowledge to allow for genuine freedom. Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, eds. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 143–162. Consider also Tom Oord's view that God involuntarily limits divine knowledge since God is constrained by the divine nature itself to create beings with significant freedom. Thomas J. Oord, *Involuntary Kenosis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, forthcoming).
48. Matthew 24:14, translation and emphasis mine.
49. Another obvious example that could fill the variables is Peter's threefold denial of Christ after Jesus was arrested.
50. Please note that such a position does not necessitate a dispensational hermeneutic for Matthew's Gospel, nor does it require a premillennial eschatology.

Part II

Open Theism and Other Philosophical Issues

4 Open Theism and Origins Essentialism

A New Argument Against Open Theism¹

David Alexander

Introduction²

Open theism claims, at minimum, that the world is open in the sense that at least some of the future is neither determined nor knowable. Open theism (OT) relies on a number of controversial philosophical doctrines including libertarian free will, presentism, divine temporalism, and the incompatibility of freedom and foreknowledge. In most of the philosophical literature objecting to OT, those controversial doctrines are challenged. In this paper, I present and briefly defend another metaphysical principle, namely, Generalized Origin Essentialism (GOE), that is incompatible with OT (or at least with standard versions of OT). Of course, given that my argument for the incompatibility between OT and GOE is valid, defenders of OT will likely simply reject GOE. However, as I try to show, the costs of dismissal are surprisingly high. So, while OTists can find themselves out of the woods, I hope to make it a costly and lonely journey.

Preliminaries

Open theism endorses what Jonathan Kvanvig calls the Asymmetry Thesis.

“*[T]he Asymmetry Thesis*” [is] the thesis that the part of the future that is determined by present and past events is secure in truth value and falls within the scope of omniscience whereas the parts of the future that remain undetermined by the present and past do not fall within the scope of omniscience and perhaps are not secure in truth value.³

According to the Asymmetry Thesis, the future is not completely open. Portions of the future are determined by the present and the past, and portions of the future are not so determined. Those portions of the future that are undetermined, most notably any events involving the exercise of free will, are also unknown by God.⁴

The metaphysical principle that is both plausible and incompatible with OT is what Robert Koons calls “Generalized Origin Essentialism.”⁵

Generalized Origin Essentialism (GOE): For a class of entities, if *E* is an entity from that class, and if *C* is causally upstream of *E*, then *C*’s existence or occurrence was logically necessary for the existence or occurrence of *E*.

Put more simply, GOE states that for any event *E*, the causal ancestry of *E* is essential to the identity of *E*. According to GOE, events’ origins are essential to them. More precisely, token events logically imply whatever is in their token causal history. In a slogan, “the token present necessitates the token past.”⁶ So, this very present implies this very past. The present of the actual world implies the past of the actual world. To clarify, first notice that GOE does not imply that the future is necessitated by the past. Indeed, one reason in favor of GOE is precisely that it helps to safeguard what open theists and others think is intuitively obvious, namely, the radical asymmetry of the past and the future. The past is closed, according to GOE, in a way that the future is not. GOE is, I will now argue, eminently plausible.⁷

A Brief Defense of GOE

Readers familiar with the ongoing debate about origin essentialism may wonder what the present paper has to say in response.⁸ For my purposes, I can safely ignore that debate since it deals with origin essentialism as applied to organisms and artifacts. GOE is primarily about events, and, as will be mentioned below, origin essentialism is much more plausible with respect to events. Furthermore, GOE is stronger than the standard formulations of origin essentialism. Kripke’s and Salmon’s versions, for example, allow for slight variation in the original material, the design plan, and the space-time location of the organism or artifact.⁹ GOE, as applied to events, does not allow for such variation. So, the arguments in the literature against origin essentialism are simply not challenges to the version of origin essentialism that is central to this paper.

In what follows I briefly state a number of different areas where GOE is relevant.¹⁰ Because GOE helps explain all sorts of phenomena, we have independent reasons to endorse it.¹¹

There are good reasons to think that events are, in the words of Chad Vance, “modally fragile.”¹² Vance’s argument takes the recycling problem for organisms and artifacts and applies it to events.

Origin essentialists typically make some version of the following claim: For all worlds *u*, and for all worlds *v*, organism *x*-in-*u* is identical to organism *y*-in-*v* if and only if both *x*-in-*u* and *y*-in-*v* originated (i) from (roughly) the same matter, (ii) with (roughly) the same initial

configuration, (iii) at (approximately) the same space-time location. Note that the terms ‘roughly’ and ‘approximately’ are meant to prevent the existence of individuals from being too fragile.¹³

If we allow for modal flexibility in the original matter, plan or configuration, or space-time location of an organism, as the above characterization of origin essentialism requires, we can show that in a nearby possible world two distinct organisms have equal claim to being identical to the original organism.¹⁴ For example, there is a possible world where the matter that originally composed you gets recycled a few minutes or hours later and originally composes another individual. Given the modal flexibility stated above, both individuals have equal claim to being you. The same problem arises for events. Modal flexibility in the location, time, properties, and substance implies that two distinct events in a nearby possible world have equal claim to being identical with the original. The best response to the recycling problem for events, it seems to me, is to deny that they are modally flexible.¹⁵ Hence, we have good reasons to accept that events are modally fragile, which in turn implies GOE for events.

Koons gives a number of reasons for thinking that GOE is true. Here are two of them. According to Koons, GOE follows from the identity conditions of facts or situations. Koons explains, “The causes of a [situation] token are essential to its identity: had the very same truth been verified by a situation caused in a different way, we would not have had the same situation as verifier.”¹⁶ Second, GOE provides an account of causal priority that explains the transitivity and asymmetry of the causal relation. The metaphysical dependency of the present on the past entails that the past is more necessary than the present, given the present. That is, given the present, the past could not have been different. But given the past, the present could have been different. The present is metaphysically dependent on the past, not vice versa. This implies that causes are more necessary than their effects. Given the token effects, the token causes could not have been different. A third reason emerges from this last one, namely that GOE helps explain the asymmetry between the past and the future.¹⁷

GOE is also relevant to defending presentism, to which OT appears to be committed. Consider the Truthmaker Objection to presentism:

1. True propositions have truthmakers.
2. There are true propositions about the past.
3. Hence, there are past truthmakers for true propositions about the past.
4. The truth-maker of a true proposition must exist.
5. Hence, past truthmakers must exist.
6. The present could be exactly the same even if the past were different.
7. Hence past truthmakers cannot be located in the present.¹⁸

Premise 6 is false, given GOE. The present entails the past. Presentists need not abandon truthmakers about the past. GOE is good news for presentists,

but it does not imply presentism. So eternalists need not worry about GOE. Eternalists simply need a different reason to reject presentism. Robert Adams pointed out the relevance of something like GOE long ago:

Presentism is as compatible as any theory could be with the view that the actual present metaphysically entails the actual past, in all its details. Indeed, that view would facilitate the metaphysical construction of the actual past from the actual present . . . What presentism says about the past is not that it is open, but that it is ontologically parasitic on the present.¹⁹

GOE is relevant to a number of issues in philosophy of religion as well. Robert Koons makes use of GOE while defending his new cosmological argument against a series of objections. Robert M. Adams's paper "Must God Create the Best?" appears to rely on something like GOE at a crucial point. Adams attempts to defend the claim that God need not create the best of all possible worlds, even if there is the best of all possible worlds. Along the way, Adams considers various proposals about what God owes his creatures. One proposal is that God wrongs a creature if God could have made that creature better than it actually is. But, Adams contends, this rests on a mistake. Leaving some of the details aside, Adams's argument rests on the idea that "no being who came into existence in better or happier circumstances would have been the same individual as the creature in question."²⁰ Thus, it is not possible for God to bring a human into existence in a better world than its actual one because doing so would result in a different creature. One obvious reason for thinking this is GOE. A change in origins results in a change in identity.

William Hasker appears to make use of GOE in various places. In "On Regretting the Evils of This World," Hasker makes heavy use of the idea that at least some of the events leading up to one's origin are necessary for one's identity.

[A]mong the necessary conditions of *my* existence [is] whatever is necessary for *my body's existence*. But what *is* necessary for this? To begin with, it is necessary that the individuals who are, in fact, my parents should have had a child. Had my mother married someone else, none of their children could have been *me*; none of their bodies could have been *this* body. But clearly, not just any child of my parents would have been me. I believe it would be widely accepted that personal identity requires an identical *genetic heritage*—that a child born to my parents at the same time that I was, in fact, born but with a significantly different genetic endowment would have been a different individual. But even genetic identity is not sufficient: identical twins are not identical *persons*, nor is either identical with the individual who would have existed had twinning not occurred. Thinking along these lines, it seems clear

that for my existence it is *at least* necessary that a particular pair of male and female reproductive cells should have joined to form a viable individual.²¹

Elsewhere, in the same paper, Hasker notes that, “Had major or significant events in the world’s past history been different than were, then in all probability neither I nor the persons whom I love would ever have existed.” And again, “The truth is, that I have no reason whatever to suppose that I would have existed, had the course of the world’s history been substantially different.”²²

Granted, Hasker does not appeal here to GOE. Nevertheless, it’s hard to see how to separate the significant events from the less significant in a way that both avoids the problems raised for origin essentialism alluded to earlier and not include the less significant events as themselves significant for the events Hasker appeals to. Hasker most likely needs GOE.

Consider now Hasker’s and other open theists’ reasons for rejecting various versions of Ockhamism. Here’s Hasker:

The claim that the past cannot be changed is better interpreted as referring to the past as a concrete totality of events and processes; this concrete totality is what it is, and nothing we now do can either add to it or subtract from it. It is in this sense that the past is fixed, unchangeable, and necessary.²³

What better way to defend these claims than by appeal to GOE? From GOE it straightforwardly follows that the past is “fixed, unchangeable, and necessary.” GOE explains the common intuition that Hasker nicely elucidates in the above passage.

Before concluding this section, here’s a brief sketch of a couple more applications of GOE that open theists especially should find attractive. GOE helps explain why at least some versions of the grandfather paradox have so much intuitive force. Jim cannot travel backwards in time to kill his infant grandfather because doing so implies that Jim is never born. But killing his infant grandfather only implies that Jim is never born if something like GOE is true (the weaker origins essentialism does the trick as well, but I think Robertson shows that standard origins essentialism is false).

Frankfurt cases have played a prominent role in debates about compatibilism versus libertarianism. In a typical Frankfurt case, we have an agent who will either perform A because of a decision to do so or will perform A because of an intervener. The agent, it turns out, performs A because of a decision and is thus morally responsible, even though the agent was going to perform A regardless. So, the agent was unable to do otherwise and is nevertheless morally responsible. Now it’s crucial that the agent is morally responsible for the action. The responsibility is present because of a decision. No decision no responsibility. But why not say “no decision, no action” or “no decision,

different type of action”? In other words, why not challenge the setup of the story. It seems crucial to the setup that the type of action performed is the same type regardless of the prior decision or the intervener. But what if we deny that? What if we say that if intervention took place the action would be of a different type? If we can get away with saying that, and given GOE and plausible assumptions about action individuation it seems like we can, then the whole thing breaks down. For now we have: An agent will either perform A because of a decision to do so or will perform B because of an intervener. And that has no bearing whatsoever on PAP.

While there are a number of other philosophical issues where GOE is relevant, the above issues are sufficient both to suggest that GOE is plausible and that at least some open theists need it. So, GOE has much going for it. With both the Asymmetry Thesis and GOE in hand we are now ready to see the problem for open theism.

The Argument

According to GOE the occurrence of event E logically implies all of the events in E's causal ancestry. But some free actions are in E's causal ancestry. Hence the occurrence of E logically implies some free actions. Now if E is future and E falls within the scope of the things that God knows, then God will also know the free actions that are part of E's causal ancestry. But some of those free actions are also in the future. Hence, by knowing E God must know some future free actions. But this is incompatible with every version of OT.²⁴ Hence, OT is false.

Here's a more detailed presentation of the argument just given:

1. There is some future event F determined by the past and present, and God knows F. (First conjunct of Asymmetry Thesis)
2. For any event E, the causal ancestry of E is essential to the identity of E. (GOE)
3. If something x is essential to the identity of something else y, then y implies x.
4. Hence, the identity of E implies the causal ancestry of E.
5. If God knows E, then God knows whatever E implies.
6. Hence, God knows whatever F implies.
7. There are future free actions in the causal ancestry of F.
8. Hence, God knows future free actions.

We are assuming the Asymmetry Thesis for now. So, premise 1 is secure.

Premise 2 is GOE and we have already seen a number of reasons to endorse it. Premise 3 is straightforward. Whatever is essential to the identity of something is implied by that thing. Thus 4 follows from 2 and 3. Of the remaining steps, premises 5 and 7 need the most defense.

Suppose God knows E, E is future, and some of the events in E's causal ancestry are free actions that are also future. Either God knows those free

actions or He does not. If God does not know those free actions, then God fails to know something entailed by something else He knows. Either God's failure to know something entailed by something else He knows is a result of God's cognitive limitation or the result of God's choosing not to know it. God does not suffer from cognitive limitations. Therefore, God's failure to know something logically entailed by something else He knows is the result of God's choosing not to know it. But this does not really help the open theist. Knowledge is not the issue. Given GOE the future free action that is in the causal ancestry of some future event is entailed by the identity conditions of the future event. So long as that future event is determined by past and present events, or God knows that future event for some other reason, everything in its causal ancestry is implied by it, including all of the free actions in its causal ancestry. God's deciding not to know that future free action does nothing to change the entailment relation. If God knows some future event, then whatever is in that event's causal ancestry is secure, not because God knows that causal ancestry, but because that causal ancestry is guaranteed by the very identity of the future event.

Premise 6 follows from 1, 4, and 5. Some may think that premise 7 is vulnerable since the causal ancestry of F might not include an action that is both free and future. But all that is needed to secure 7 is that there is a future event E that God knows and that there is a future free action that is prior to E. To be in the causal ancestry of some event E is, in most cases, simply to be in the past of E.²⁵ As there are no completely causally isolated events in the world, the claim is secure.²⁶

What all of the foregoing implies, I think, is that one must either reject GOE or the Asymmetry Thesis (of course, one is free to reject both, but why do that if inconsistency can be removed by getting rid of just one of them). GOE has a lot going for it; open theists themselves have expressed either explicit or implicit endorsement of it, GOE helps explain a number of other philosophical theses widely embraced by others, and GOE helps explain a number of common sense beliefs. If something must go, it seems to me that it's the Asymmetry Thesis. So, if you want to be an open theist, you really should go all the way; there are no future events determined by past and present events, and there are no future events—even events that do not involve exercises of free will—known by God. If you think that's too far to go, and many open theists and others think it is, then don't be an open theist.

Notes

1. There are some versions of open theism that can avoid the argument I will present. So, this paper is better titled, "A New Argument Against Some Versions of Open Theism." But that's a boring title.
2. I'd like to thank the editor of this volume, Tony Bryson, Jonathan Krull, John Noble, and participants at the 2017 Baptist Association of Philosophy Teachers conference for helpful feedback and discussion.
3. Jonathan Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 65.

4. Here's Greg Boyd endorsing the substance of the Aysmmetry Thesis: "We agree that if God foreknows a future event it must either be because he determined it or because it is an inevitable effect of past or present causes," *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 23. "Open theists rather maintain that God can and does predetermine and foreknow whatever he wants to about the future. Indeed, God is so confident in his sovereignty, we hold, he does not need to micromanage everything. He could if he wanted to, but this would demean his sovereignty. So, he chooses to leave some of the future to possibilities, allowing them to be resolved by the decisions of free agents," *ibid.*, 31.
5. Robert Koons, *Realism Regained: An Exact Theory of Causation, Teleology, and the Mind* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 29–37, 55, 116–117.
6. *Ibid.*
7. I think that the different ways I flesh out GOE are equivalent or are at least not distinct enough from each other to pose a problem for the argument of this paper.
8. See for example Teresa Robertson, "Possibilities and the Arguments for Origin Essentialism," *Mind* 107 (1998): 729–749, as well as the many articles responding to Robertson's paper.
9. Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); and Nathan Salmon, *Reference and Essence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).
10. I do not go into much detail and I do not respond to possible objections. Interested readers can turn to David E. Alexander and Alexander Pruss "A Semantic Internalism With External Semantic Dependence," as well as my "Causal Argument Against Disjunctivism Reconsidered," both unpublished.
11. These reasons are independent of the main argument given in this paper.
12. See his "The Recycling Problem for Event Individuation," *Erkenntnis* 81, no. 1 (2016): 1–16.
13. *Ibid.*, 4.
14. T.J. McKay, "Against Constitutional Sufficiency Principles," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 11 (1986): 295–304 is the first article to present this problem.
15. Vance, "The Recycling Problem," 14.
16. Koons, *Realism Regained*, 116.
17. My argument below against OT may seem to undermine this third reason but I don't think it does. Nothing in my argument implies that there are no causal relations or that there is no difference between the past and future.
18. This problem or variations of it has been discussed in a number of articles. See for example, John Bigelow, "Presentism and Properties," *Philosophical Perspectives* 10 (1996): 46; Thomas Crisp, "Presentism," in *Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, eds. Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 211–245; Michael C. Rea, "Four Dimensionalism," in Loux and Zimmerman, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, 246–280; Ned Markosian, "A Defense of Presentism," *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* 1 (2004): 47–82; and Simon Keller, "Truthmakers and Presentism," *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* 1 (2004): 83–106.
19. Robert Adams, "Reply to Kvanvig," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 50, no. 2 (1989): 299–301.
20. Robert Adams, "Must God Create the Best?" *Philosophical Review*, 81, no. 3 (1972): 317–332, 332.
21. William Hasker, "On Regretting the Evils of This World," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 19, no. 4 (1981): 425–437, 427.
22. *Ibid.*, 431.
23. William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

24. That is, every version of open theism is incompatible with the claim that God knows that S will A, where A is both in S's future and free.
25. The reason for the "in most cases" qualification is that I think (a) that God's action(s) can be in the causal ancestry of an event without being in the past of that event, and (b) causes and effects can be simultaneous. Neither of these, however, helps the open theist.
26. Note also that none of this implies determinism.

5 The ‘Openness’ in Compatibilism

Paul Helm

The novelist works in a world where choices are still open. Moving forward with her character, she hesitates with him at the fork in the road. His information is imperfect. His map is barely legible. In the novel, he is ignorant of the future, and free.

—Hilary Mantel

The paper is concerned with the nature of openness. It is obviously a state that can be enjoyed in various degrees. First, a typical openness position which rests on indeterminacy is discussed. Its flimsiness together with the theological costs of adopting it is discussed. It is suggested that compatibilism properly understood entails a degree of openness, not merely purely epistemic but essential as well. This, it is suggested, should satisfy all who desire their theology to be ‘open.’

Four Arguments for the Indeterminacy of the Future

In a section of his paper “The Philosophical Case for Open Theism,” entitled “On Behalf of Future Contingents,” Alan Rhoda offers four arguments for causal contingency, for an ontologically open future.¹ Let us call these: the argument from deliberation; the argument from quantum mechanics; the argument from intuition; and finally the argument from evil. I shall counter-argue that none of these arguments is compelling individually, nor do they amount to a cumulative case for causal contingency. If the causal indeterminacy of the future cannot be established fails then openness theism, “generic openness” as Rhoda calls it, will also fail. Then I shall proceed to consider the place of contingency in compatibilism.

In his first argument, the argument from deliberation, Rhoda has this to say about deliberation and openness: “[W]e invariably conceive of our choice situation as one in which we have it in our power to make one of several mutually exclusive choices.”² The question here is whether Rhoda has said enough in order to take us in an indeterministic direction. For the critical question is how we understand that power to make choices, in its nature and exercise;

whether it must be interpreted as an unconditional power or conditional. But for the moment let us put such considerations on hold. Rhoda's idea is that at this present time, 'now,' the future is (in certain respects) indeterminate causally, and that it is ourselves by our choice of unconditional power, who make the future what it will be as a result of that choice. While being open to various interpretations, Rhoda says that such experience of deliberation "is *prima facie* evidence of future contingency."³ But it is *prima facie* evidence of future contingency only if we conceive of our situation as one in which we possess unconditional power to choose A or to choose B. Otherwise, since we cannot choose both, we need to have a reason or ground of some kind to choose one or the other, or to refuse both. And so our experience is of the kind of being able to do A if we want to or B if we want to, or neither if that is what we want.

What is the connection between libertarianism and the indeterminacy of the future? It is, according to libertarianism in its 'openness' application, that libertarian free choices etch out much of the future. But compatibilists may claim that on their account of deliberation and choice the future is etched out too, so that by human activity the far future becomes the near future, and then becomes now, and then the present becomes the past. At t_1 , the future at t_2 is in part brought about by the causal efficacy of free will, not by a series of creations *ex nihilo* and nor by fate or a divine decree, say, that does not engage the human will.⁴ More on this later.

It is convenient to consider Rhoda's third argument, the argument from intuition, alongside the argument from deliberation, as they have similarities. He notes that as "Robert Kane has recently pointed out, we have deep-seated intuitions about moral responsibility that are strongly tied to the sense that we are ultimately responsible for at least some of our choices."⁵ Certainly a compatibilist would concur with this statement, which is intended to support libertarianism, for as it stands it is seriously ambiguous, depending on the meaning of "ultimately responsible" and on the nature of human free choice, which is what is at issue. Rhoda goes on, "Kane means that if we trace the causal ancestry of our choices back far enough, we would eventually arrive at an indeterministic 'self-forming action' over which we ourselves had unconditional power to do otherwise."⁶ But when this is disambiguated by Rhoda, it becomes question-begging.

He illustrates it by the example of habit-forming. The way in which our own characters, or our own characters with respect to some particular matter, are formed looks like they proceed from a primitive, less developed, state of ourselves when we choose, what is called a "self-forming action." How do Kane and Rhoda know all this? Such an appeal cannot count as an argument for libertarianism, since it presupposes it. But "self-forming" is ambiguous since an individual in this position presumably has a self already. "Self-developing" would be less ambiguous. To that expression, the compatibilist need have no objection.

Rhoda continues, "To develop this thought a bit, consider that the choices we make over time shape and mold our character. Over time, our character

may become so settled, so habit-bound in certain respects that we cannot do otherwise.”⁷ Rhoda amplifies the point with respect to the development of an addiction. Such a pattern is well-documented; a young person is offered their first tippie, which he or she accepts and enjoys, and they develop the pleasant habit of a having a drink in the evening. Then, perhaps undergoing a period of stress and unhappiness, they come to depend on the bottle even more, and then can’t stop. Addiction. But where’s the ‘self-forming’ indeterministic action in all this? It is likely that there was a point when that person could have stopped the decline. But at that point when the person did not want to continue with their habitual drinking, or wanted to insufficiently decisively, the desire for drink prevailed. And then it was too late, without help, to quit. But such a story can be plausibly related by a compatibilist. Further, there is no evidence that is provided un-question-beggingly that a “thoroughgoing determinism seems to be incompatible with moral responsibility.”⁸

Rhoda has two more arguments. The argument from quantum physics has to do with physical indeterminism at the micro level. He says, “According to most widely accepted interpretations of the theory [viz. of quantum mechanics] among physicists, events at the quantum level are genuinely indeterministic.”⁹ But in what sense? The quoted remark concerns the limitations of human observation, but there is no reason to think that it is in the same way true of observation from the Creator’s standpoint. As for being the observant precursor to these indeterministic events, the sovereign God is presumably their causal precursor. Nor is there reason to think that God is thus playing dice.

If he [God] freely wills into being a succession of events in which one half of the sub-microscopic details at any time are unspecified by their precursors, this would involve no inconsistency with his character, still less with his sovereignty.¹⁰

In any case, a libertarian that appeals to subatomic indeterminacy is faced with the question of whether events at the micro level transfer their indeterminacy to events at the macro level. And the argument has little to do with logically indeterminate futures.

And finally there is the argument from evil, a familiar card to play. On theological determinism Rhoda says, “[E]very evil thing, from the Fall to the Holocaust to the eternal damnation of the reprobate, is something that God directly brings about or irresistibly sets in motion.”¹¹ Let us suppose that this is so. I make two points. Firstly, a point on behalf of those whom Rhoda has in his sights at this point, such as “Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Edwards.”¹² They believed that God has a plan for his creation that is overall good. For a contemporary statement of such an idea, see Alvin Plantinga’s, “Supralapsarianism, or O Felix Culpa.”¹³ Obviously, notorious evils may be included within that plan. It would be fallacious to argue that in a good plan every element must be good. Openness theists, apart from

painting a picture in which God is a celestial chess grandmaster outwitting his libertarian creatures, in the style of the William James/Peter Geach analogy, say little about God's plans. Whatever they may be, God evidently has not been one hundred per cent successful in his recent games of chess, for (presumably) he could have prevented the Holocaust from developing or the rise of militant Islam, and he knows this, which suggests that he has a plan in which notorious evils figure.

Earlier in his article Rhoda had said that the God envisaged by openness theism "created the world *ex nihilo* and can unilaterally intervene in it as he pleases."¹⁴ So it might readily be asked of every evil, or of every notorious evil, why God did not unilaterally intervene to prevent it or to mitigate it? Why did he not nip it in the bud? Presumably because he had a sufficient reason not to. This suggests that both for the open theist and for the theological compatibilist alike there is a place for a "skeptical" exclamation such as, "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" (I Cor. 2:16). So Rhoda's remarks on evil, besides expressing a distaste for Calvinism, do not seem to amount to a convincing argument against compatibilism and in favor of openness.

We have looked at three or four arguments in favor of the logical indeterminacy of the future, but none is persuasive. In fact they are distinctly weak. So, since a persuasive account of libertarianism is at the heart of openness theism, of what Rhoda calls "generic" openness, it fails.

The Costs of Libertarian Freedom

To my mind, believers who are advocates of libertarian freedom are prepared to go to extraordinary philosophical and theological lengths to preserve and enhance its prospects. For example, this propensity seems to explain the current popularity of Molinism, which is a way to attempt to preserve both libertarian freedom and a robust doctrine of divine providence by importing an apparatus of considerable complexity, itself open to various costs, in order that we all theists may breathe the Alpine airs of theistic libertarianism with a good conscience.

More to the point here, in my view what is called openness theism is willing to bear even more—and opposite costs than does the Molinist, costs to be borne on the theological as well as the philosophical front. We might note two such theological costs.

Divine omniscience has to be radically rewritten, in its scope if not in its definition, since as we have seen in the case of the future there is a logically indeterminate sector in which human and divine libertarian freedom play themselves out. Such indeterminateness is said to require that we accept the thesis that not all propositions have a definite truth-value. This approach to the Principle of Bivalence is due in modern times to the development of tense logic by Arthur N. Prior, as are some of its theological applications.¹⁵ The Principle of Bivalence is rejected, there is a three-value logic; every proposition

is either true, or false, or presently neither-true-nor-false. Though modern in its expression, the position echoes certain views of Cicero's discussed by Augustine in *The City of God Book V*.¹⁶ The basics of this outlook were articulated in the 1960s and 1970s by Prior and other philosophers such as Anthony Kenny,¹⁷ well before the emergence of a self-conscious 'open theism' in the 1990s, in books such as *The Openness of God* and *God, Time, and Knowledge*.¹⁸

On such a prospectus a God either simply cannot know all the truth-values of all propositions, or in the case of a weaker and more orthodox (philosophical and theological) version of openness it is not that God cannot know all propositions, but that he has forgone such knowledge, again in the interests of the flourishing of libertarian freedom. This is Richard Swinburne's view in *The Coherence of Theism*.¹⁹ J.R. Lucas in *The Future*, goes further, holding that "God is not only fallible but actually mistaken."²⁰ This divine forgoing of 'full' omniscience is itself a curious notion, for God has to place himself in a situation in which, in kenotic fashion, he foregoes a knowledge of some of the future, namely that which depends for its outcome on the making of creaturely indeterminate choices. As a consequence, there are for him not 'known unknowns' but 'presently unknowable unknowns.' That is, God exists in a state or for a time in which he forbears to know some future facts, and he cannot know, that is, he cannot identify, what he has chosen not to know. Who knows what surprises await him?

Compatibilist Openness

Having examined the arguments offered by Rhoda for libertarianism and noted the theological costs of openness, in the remainder of this paper, I shall occupy the territory and the outlook of a theistic compatibilist. In what remains I shall focus on the area of human deliberation. This is undertaken in an effort to clarify compatibilism and to defend it from some of the criticisms made of it. These matters do not include such an objection to theological compatibilism that it entails that God is author of sin.

I shall argue that compatibilism can furnish us with all the openness that we need, without the philosophical or theological costs that 'openness theism' necessarily incurs.

Many events are capable of having consequences that are not foreseen by human beings. And all sorts of agents are capable of producing effects which, as far as their human bystanders are concerned, are not intended. And some unexpected consequences may also be unforeseen. A tree may fall over unexpectedly, a wave may be a freak wave, an insect may suddenly sting, and so on. Human actions may have these properties too, the property of being brought about by unforeseen factors and so of being capable of surprising us.

I shall argue that such 'contingency,' hiddenness, is necessary for the contemplation and execution of human decisions to act. If the action is to be spontaneous, free from external coercion, as compatibilists affirm, then if it

is deliberated then it must be undertaken in the presence of a veil of ignorance as to what a person will decide to do at that point.

As far as theistic compatibilists are concerned, if God decrees a future free action of ours and thus knows that it will occur, we, who cannot (usually, or often) know for sure the direction in which the free agent's choice is about to incline itself will not know its outcome, for it is contingent.

In such a case the individual's ignorance may not only be a feature of a person's lack of knowledge only of others' actions, but someone will encounter such a lack of knowledge regarding his own actions. We are frequently unable to tell for sure how we are going to make up our minds. Until we do so, we do not know what we will do until the point of choice. Some way off that point the decision may, as far as we are concerned, go either way; it may be a choice of A if at that point there's a predominating reason for A, or a choice of B if it is preferred. It is not until we have finally and irrevocably made up our minds that we ourselves can be said to know what we have decided to do; and the decision may be surprising to us. Even actions that we ourselves may consider doing, and do, may be like this too. So Joe may decide to wear his new tie this morning, and be rather surprised by his decision.

So an agent is frequently in the condition of not knowing the outcome of his own and others' deliberations. Such deliberation is not that which can be traced back to an indeterministic self-making action of the kind specified by Kane and Rhoda. But it is nevertheless a necessary condition for compatibilistic deliberated actions.

As we engage in new deliberations and new choices, there are new indeterminacies until these choices have been made, and our minds are irrevocably made up. As we have suggested, the choices made may surprise us, even if they are our own choices, and we have a sufficient reason for them. The epistemic openness of compatibilism throws light on the intelligibility and freedom of the agent's action and distinguishes the determinism of compatibilism from that of fatalism and of course of openness, even if there is no detectable difference in practice between logical indeterminacy and epistemic openness.

The Decree of God and Human Agency

The operation of a divine decree such as Calvinists maintain does not take away such powers of choice with respect to creaturely causes, because the decreer also decrees that the end should come about by the person making his mind up for himself in a state of ignorance as to what his choice may turn out to be.

It may surprise some than no less authentic a Calvinist than John Calvin himself says this:

Hence as to future time, because the issue of all things is hidden from us, each ought to so apply himself to his office, as though nothing were determined about any part.²¹

The basic idea here is that the divine decree does not smother or collapse or override the distinction between causes that enforce a choice and causes that are free choices. So that while all things that are decreed are necessitated by the decree, and so their occurrence is either hypothetically necessary, (in the view of those compatibilists for whom God possesses freedom of *alternativity*), or absolutely necessary (if God possesses *source-freedom* only),²² for the agent they involve the resolving of a state of personal indecision.

Reference to the divine decree suggests 'fatalism' to many. If the human situations are abstracted from considerations to do with the decree of God, and taken in their own terms, as human actions, they retain this distinctive character of being decided upon in conditions of ignorance. Putting the point in a different way, if Joe has not made up his mind with respect to A or not-A, or A but not B, his belief that God has eternally decreed A (and so not B) or B (and so not A), is functionally inoperative for Joe. The decree being unknown it is of no help to Joe to know simply that the outcome has been decreed by God. Whichever alternative it is that God has decreed, he has usually kept the character of that decree to himself. So the liberty and spontaneity of actions possessing these properties, Joe's having his own reason for doing what he does, are not compromised. This is a necessity which secures the occurrence of an action or event but only (typically) through the outworking of a person's own agency, freely in the case of a thing that has powers of understanding and will, necessary in cases where the powers at work are not intelligent.

At such a point open theists will reiterate that a contingency in the sense that we have been using is not the open theists' logical indeterminacy. Quite so. The choice is the result of the beliefs and desires of the agent. But how can the agent be free and responsible if God has decreed some particular action? For surely the belief that Joe has that A is to be his choice and not B may be false. To drive this home the libertarian dissenter may be at this point be tempted to use the hoary argument that it is possible that a cosmic puppeteer or programmer has so arranged things that while Joe feels free and his action seems to possess the epistemic openness described, he is in fact being manipulated, and that this is what undermines the so-called contingency of the choice. This is in effect a strategy to show that an action may have the appearance of a reason-based, unconstrained action but the reality may be that it was the outcome of manipulation, either malicious or playful. Such an argument gains its attraction from the assumption that libertarianism is the default position, and that such a 'malign demon' suffices to disarm compatibilism—but, of course, not otherwise. God's decreeing what comes to pass does not give any one the slightest reason to think that such a state of affairs will occur.

Further, the puppeteer or programmer argument is one that can be employed in either direction, either to attempt to disarm determinism or to do the same with respect to libertarianism. So we may imagine a person supposedly performing an indeterminately free action who is in fact being the subject of the attentions of a cosmic randomizer who has implanted in her brain a device that causes reasons for actions to occur randomly. How do we know that this

is not in fact occurring? Why should the manipulator argument be targeted exclusively at a compatibilist? Why should a state of affairs that is produced compatibilistically be taken to be a case of appearance and not of reality, while a libertarian state of affairs produced in a parallel manner be impervious to that sort of objection?

Ignorance regarding the future as being epistemically necessary for the uncoerced character of action according to compatibilism connects with a further feature of compatibilist agency. On compatibilism the act of an agent may have true causally efficacy, providing a necessary causal condition for certain things happening. The agent is an agent; she brings about certain ends though her beliefs.

There are theories of action in which the beliefs and desires of human beings are 'epiphenomena'²³ of sets of physical causes at a level that are more basic, and these more basic causes do all the work, so to speak. And there are theories that suppose that the fates conspire to bring about their ends in such a way that the description under which the agent acts makes him unaware of his true fate until it 'overtakes' him. Suppose that a man is fated to kill his mother. So he murders the person that he thinks is his girlfriend when in fact she is his mother in disguise, so fulfilling the fate that he is destined to murder his mother. And it may be tempting for someone to think that compatibilism in a theistic framework is like that. So it may be thought that all that matters is the divine decree, and that human action is simply a shadow reflected onto the walls of the tunnel of created time, having no efficacy in its own right. Or the divine decree is caricatured as if were like a tram and that all a human being can do is to defer to it by jumping on it, as he sees it trundle to the terminus. And God is caricatured as if he were the Grand Puppeteer thinking our thoughts and performing our actions which we must perforce think and vocalize. If I am destined such that A is to befall me, then there is nothing that I can do to prevent A. Hence human agency is inoperable or pointless.

Primary and Secondary Causes

Maybe some think the following is how it goes: God brings about causes from his eternal height, and that divine and human willing, operating at different levels of causality, jointly cause the same effect, with the human willing concurring in the divine, or vice versa. God is the senior partner, and all that occurs on the human side, the side of secondary causation, is meek and automatic acquiescence.

But on compatibilism, human actions are subject to indecision, to facing dilemmas, to the interplay between short-term and long-term considerations, to the possible conflicts between the operation of the reason and the bodily appetites, and so forth.

It is sometimes said that God, the Creator, is the primary cause of all that happens, while his creatures are (various different cases of) secondary

cause. But God's primary causal activity cannot be that of being the senior partner in the sense just suggested. His activity is concerned *inter alia* with the decreeing and governing of creaturely human actions. And this idea of decreeing the actions, concurring with them and governing them, introduces us to another, more positive, set of factors. As the governor of his creatures (as we have already noted from some of our examples), God himself has purposes, and is not simply the facilitator of merely creaturely purposes, or fate working impersonally. Let us consider this a little further.

Two people, out of different motives, or for different reasons, may cooperate in carrying out some plan. Let us suppose that their cooperation is causally necessary and sufficient for executing the plan. The motives and intentions of one of these people might be significantly different from those of the other, but they purpose together in carrying out the action. This would be an instance of the cooperation of two secondary causes.

But in the case of divine and human agency, though each may have different motives or intentions in an action that both are engaged in, God the decreer, a person the agent, this is not a case of symmetrical cooperation, since there is a significant asymmetry between the two. As well as having purposes of his own, the divine agent is also the creator and upholder and governor of the human agent and of all creaturely factors in operation.

If divine and creaturely purposing were each symmetrical with each other, necessary in the same sense, in order to bring about a physical action such as me lifting my left arm, then we would have the following rather peculiar state of affairs: for my arm to be raised, purposing at the creaturely level would be necessary, but the purposing by God would be necessary at that level too, in exactly the same sense. Thus there would be, for any creaturely action, two sets of cooperating necessary causal conditions in the same sense—my action in raising my arm is necessary but not sufficient, and God's action is necessary but not sufficient. Together they are necessary and sufficient, their joint action ensuring the success of my action.

But this is not how it is, on theistic compatibilism. God's purpose with respect to a human person freely bringing about an action comes to pass in ways that 'respect' the integrity of human nature and its action performed through the exercise of its own powers.

God typically decrees and upholds and governs his creature in the creature's carrying out of his purposes, and in doing that God has purposes of his own, which the creature's purposes contribute to in unknown ways and partly fulfill. (Miracles and acts of saving grace require different treatment.) Joe really chooses to wear his new tie, and as a consequence wears it. His action is not in reality God's action, or partly God's action, nor is what he does the mere 'occasion' of God's working. Yet if he wears his new tie, God's decree that Joe wears his new tie on such and such an occasion is fulfilled.

So each sort of purpose, including the purposes that are entailed by human actions, may, it seems, be capable of bringing about changes that surprise us, and the agent himself might be included in those that are surprised. Among

agents of such changes are those whose powers and their effects may produce such unexpected effects.

So far, so straightforward, or so it may seem. Within the contingent world order, certain classes of events are necessary, certain kinds of other events are contingent, 'free.' Provided we index the expression temporally we may say that the outcome intended with respect to the second cause is epistemically indeterminate. But it does not follow that they are epistemically indeterminate as far as the first cause is concerned. God in Calvinism (though not of course in openness and some other systems) decrees all such matters. At any present moment, they are presently future with respect to us.

If their truth is epistemically indeterminate with respect to Joe (who in the case imagined cannot see in which direction he is about to choose), it is not so with respect to God. So God's decree, besides being that to which the existence of human beings as a class is due, is a knowing decree, which reaches toward all future events, including human actions. In a way that is unimaginable to us. In respect of the divine decreer, to whom the future appears as eternally present, God knows each action from that eternal standpoint. But to the human agents, such as Joe, and to any other creaturely knowers of others' human actions, they cannot presently see the outcomes, because they, the secondary causes, have not yet decided in which direction they shall go.

So a compatibilist does not have a problem with the case of a person's inability to make up his mind at t_1 and his resolution of this indecision at t_2 . It is resolved compatibilistically, if it is resolved at all, and the reasons why it is not resolved, if it is not, are also understood compatibilistically.

There is scarcely any example of an allegedly indeterminate free choice that cannot be parsed compatibilistically. Take, for example, this passage from the libertarian Robert Kane. He is countering the frequently made criticism made by compatibilists that such libertarianism is indistinguishable from randomness or whimsy. Kane says:

[U]nder such conditions, the choice the woman might make either way will not be "inadvertent," "accidental," "capricious," or "merely random" (as critics of indeterminism say) because the choice will be willed by the woman either way when it is made, and it will be done for reasons either way—reasons that she then and there endorses . . . So when she decides, she endorses one set of competing reasons over the other as the one she will act on. But willing what you do in this way, and doing it for reasons that you endorse, are conditions usually required to say something is done "on purpose," rather than accidentally, capriciously, or merely by chance.²⁴

For Kane indeterministic choices are not capricious or whimsical because they are performed for reasons which the agent has and endorses. He wills them and has reasons for doing so, and this is a condition for action on purpose rather than for action as some chancy occurrence.

Quite so. But an action done for a reason is one way of describing one sort of unconstrained action compatible with human freedom, according to the compatibilist. So where's the distinctiveness of libertarianism if this characterization of it is also a characterization of compatibilism? As Jerry Walls notes,

Compatibilists, moreover, like Pharoah's magicians, seem capable of duplicating in their own terms every power and ability that libertarians claim view their distinctively grants to agents.²⁵

I suspect that's an outlook that is a characteristic of libertarianism more generally. To meet the charge of whimsy or arbitrariness, libertarians invoke reasons. And the compatibilists, listening in, say, "Thank you very much!" To see whether or not this is the case, here's a challenge—let us call it the Compatibilist Challenge—to libertarians, for an account of a libertarian action or choice, either at the explanatory or at the phenomenological level, that would not also be an explanation that is consistent with compatibilism.

If libertarians fail to meet this challenge, then it looks like there is no empirically identifiable state of affairs which can be the criterion of an indeterministic free choice. Suppose we characterize libertarianism as the power, everything being identical inside and outside when Joe makes his choice, or perhaps something even more sophisticated. Libertarianism is a consistent theory, of course, but it is impossible, so it seems to me, that a synchronically free choice can be identified as such by the agent herself or by an onlooker. The claim that such a choice is occurring or has occurred is unverifiable. It is not for that reason cognitively meaningless, but its unverifiability disables libertarianism, rendering it unpersuasive. We might say, insofar as the libertarian can make a virtue out of choice, that the compatibilist can do the same. But the compatibilist's brand of alternativity is in principle verifiable, since there is some factor or ground that accounts for the difference in the choice of A and the alternative choice of B or of not-A.

Conclusion

I have argued that the arguments for the logical indeterminacy of the future are unpersuasive. Compatibilism is consistent with the evidence appealed to for libertarianism, such as the presence of indecision, dilemmas in choosing, and the conflict between duty and pleasure. Insofar as a libertarian can resolve such actions by an appeal to a 'reason' the compatibilist can do the same. The putative indeterministic 'self-making actions' are question-begging, and in any case unverifiable.

Further, the theological as well as philosophical costs of openness are considerable. Compatibilism entails real causal agency, involving deliberation in an (epistemic) open future, the openness being necessary for compatibilistic agency, in which ends are brought about by means and not by a *deus ex machina*. On compatibilism, human actions are not 'epiphenomena.'

On the other side of the debate, compatibilism is distinguishable from fatalism. The argument against compatibilism frequently cited, the argument from the possibility of programming, is applicable *pari passu* to claimed indeterministic choices themselves. God's activity is distinct from the activity of his creatures.

For all these reasons openness is unpersuasive and unattractive to classical Christian theism. In these circumstances it is reasonable to place the onus on the openness theist to argue for the libertarianism which is at its heart, and not to assume, as he frequently does assume, that libertarianism is the default position.

This paper is an attempt to meet openness theism on some of its own territory, its central feature of human openness, and following this, of divine openness. I have tried to show that compatibilist accounts of the concept of choice involves the necessary ignorance of the agent with respect to the future. And compatibilist theists do not have to pay the theological price that openness theists pay. Openness believers willingly pay it, of course. So a discussion of the idea of openness can hardly begin to settle anything.

Notes

1. Alan Rhoda, "The Philosophical Case for Open Theism," *Philosophia* (2007): 301–311, 301ff. There is much more to Rhoda's paper than the defense of causal contingency, but such contingency is necessary for openness. See also Alan Rhoda, "Generic Open Theism and Some Varieties Thereof," *Religious Studies* (2008): 225–234.
2. Rhoda, "Philosophical Case," 304.
3. *Ibid.*, 304.
4. "To be sure, quantum mechanics, according to leading interpretations, is indeterministic. But indeterminism at that level does not ensure that any human brains themselves sometimes operate indeterministically, much less that they sometimes operate indeterministically in ways appropriate for free action and moral responsibility." Alfred Mele, *Free Will and Luck* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10.
5. Rhoda, "Philosophical Case," 304.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, 305, emphasis in original.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Donald M. Mackay, *Science, Chance, and Providence* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 30.
11. Rhoda, "Philosophical Case," 305.
12. *Ibid.*, 303.
13. Alvin Plantinga, "Supralapsarianism, or O Felix Culpa," in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Peter van Inwagen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 1–25.
14. Rhoda, "Philosophical Case," 303.
15. See for example See for example Arthur N. Prior, *Essays on Time and Tense* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1968), which includes his paper 'The Formalities of Omniscience'.

16. Augustine, *The City of God* (London: Penguin, 2004), 343, from Book V, Chapter 9, 'Of God's foreknowledge and man's freedom of election; against the opinion of Cicero'.
17. Anthony Kenny, "Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom," in *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1969). This essay shows the influence of Prior in the use that Kenny makes of tensed propositions in commenting on Aquinas.
18. Clark Pinnock et al. *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994); and William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).
19. Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), 175–176.
20. J.R. Lucas, *The Future* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 224.
21. John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. J.K.S. Reid (London: James Clarke & Co., 1982), 171.
22. John Calvin would be an example of the first, Jonathan Edwards of the second. For discussion that bears on such differences, see Justin Daeley, "Divine Freedom and Contingency: An Intelligibility Problem for (Some) Theistic Compatibilists," *Religious Studies* (2015): 563–582.
23. As espoused by T.H. Huxley, "On the Hypothesis that Animals Are Automata, and Its History," *The Fortnightly Review* (1874): 555–580, 555ff.
24. Robert Kane, "Libertarianism," in *Four Views on Free Will* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 5ff.
25. Jerry Walls, "Why No Classical Theist, Let Alone Orthodox Christian, Should Ever Be a Compatibilist," *Philosophia Christi* (2011): 75–104, 77. Walls cites Stewart Goetz, "Stump on Libertarianism and the Principle of Alternative Possibilities," *Faith and Philosophy* (2001): 93–101, 93ff. (Incidentally, the presumption that libertarianism is the default position, mentioned early, is clearly visible here. Compatibilists are like Pharoah's magicians, not the friends of the people of God, while indeterminists are like the God-fearing Moses!)

6 Foreknowledge, Freedom, and Vicious Circles

Anselm vs. Open Theism

Katherin A. Rogers

Anselm of Canterbury is concerned to defend human moral responsibility which is robust enough to ground praise and blame and, most importantly, to allow us to be self-creators such that we can have some say in what sort of people we become. This leads him to propose a (and possibly the first) systematic and well-developed libertarian analysis of free will.¹ It is sometimes said among contemporary philosophers of religion that the libertarian theist must choose between Molinism and open theism. But Molinism entails claims that are arguably incoherent and open theism offers a God who is quite diminutive—He doesn't even know the future! Happily, Anselm offers an alternative; a way to advance a libertarian analysis of free will within the universe of classical theism in which God is "that than which nothing greater can be conceived."

In the present paper I outline Anselm's libertarian theory, explain how God knows future free choices, and respond to a number of criticisms posed by open theists. I argue first that, contrary to the views of some open theists, Anselm's theory of free will offers us plenty of freedom—as much freedom as anyone should want. Next I briefly review and respond to a series of problems which open theists have raised against the Anselmian approach (or against somewhat similar positions) and which I have dealt with at more length elsewhere. I conclude by addressing two open theist criticisms which I have not discussed in earlier work. First: Wouldn't God's knowing His own future actions mean that He can't *decide* what to do? And second: If God issues prophecies based on His knowledge of the future, doesn't this involve vicious causal loops?

For Anselm, in order for human beings to be responsible moral agents and to be self-creators, we must be able to make *a se* choices. That is, we must be able to be the ultimate originators of our choices. Anselm's insistence on aseity entails what I will call the "grounding principle": the truth about an *a se* choice, and hence knowledge about an *a se* choice, can be grounded in (or dependent upon) only the actual choice itself.² This means, first of all, that an *a se* choice cannot be *causally* necessitated. Anselm sees one kind of exception to this claim. In that the point of being able to make *a se* choices is that the created agent should be capable of self-creation, if the agent, by

making *a se* choices, creates in himself a character such that that character causally necessitates future choices, those choices can be derivatively *a se* in that it was up to the agent to form the character. The responsibility for the character determined choice can be “traced” through the character to the character-forming *a se* choices.³

The grounding principle has yet another important entailment. There cannot be any true propositions about what some agent will or would *a se* choose in the absence of the agent actually choosing. Thus, the Molinist proposal that there are true propositions, so-called counterfactuals of freedom, about what created agents *would* “freely” choose in the absence of the actual agents actually choosing entails what I will call “external non-causal necessity” (or ENC). It is “non-causal” in that the Molinist does not hold that, were the actual agent confronted with the actual choice, the counterfactual of freedom would somehow exert *causal power* over him to make him choose in accordance with the counterfactual. Nonetheless, the existence of the counterfactual of freedom does entail “necessity” because, were the agent to actually confront the choice he *must* choose in accordance with the counterfactual of freedom. And it is an “external” necessity in that the agent himself is not the source of the non-causal necessity. An *a se* choice cannot be ENC-necessitated. (But it could be *internally* non-causally necessitated, as we will see below.)

But how can a created agent choose with aseity in the universe of classical theism in which everything with any sort of ontological status at all is caused to exist and maintained in existence from moment to moment by God? Everything about us from the subatomic particles in our left thumb to every mental entity in our minds exists only because God is causing it to exist. And yet Anselm will not have it that God causes our choices. For one thing, it is *logically impossible* that God cause the choice to sin, and yet we do choose to sin.⁴ More importantly—and this applies to choosing both ill and well—if God caused our choices, then they wouldn’t ultimately be up to us. We wouldn’t be responsible.⁵

To solve this puzzle Anselm proposes an extremely clever analysis of libertarian free will, what I am calling *parsimonious* agent causation. God sets up our motivational structure such that we can find ourselves in the “torn condition” (TC). We can be struggling to pursue two (or possibly more, but say “two” for simplicity’s sake) motives, where both cannot be ultimately realized, and one is morally better than the other. (Moral choices are what Anselm—and most of us—are interested in, though he grants that there may be other venues for choice.) So picture some agent S in TC such that he is desiring A and B, both cannot be realized, and A is the morally preferable option. All the elements in TC including S, S’s faculty of will (however we analyze that), and S’s desires for A and for B, are caused to exist by God. But now Anselm has to coin a new term to explain how S is to make a choice, which choice is *not* caused by God. The term is “per-will,” (*pervelle*).⁶ The thought is this: At some point S desires B—let us say—such that the desire

for B becomes an intention and this “expels” (*expulit*) the desire for A. It is S’s per-willing B that constitutes the choice for B over A. But the desire for B comes from God, and all that S does is continue desiring that desire to the point where the desire for A is no longer viable.⁷ The choice has no ontological status above and beyond the desire for B. It is what I am calling a “thin event”; it is an event, it happens at a time, it may prove exceedingly important, but it does not constitute some new entity added to the sum of what there is in the universe.⁸ But, thin though it is, the choice is absolutely up to S. S could have per-willed A. It is an *a se* choice for which S can be held responsible and which may contribute to the sort of person S becomes. So Anselm’s theory is best called “agent causation” in that it is up to the created agent, and only to that agent, to opt for A over B or B over A. But, unlike other versions of agent causation, it is parsimonious in that it does not introduce some new species of cause especially to account for human moral agency. Even lower animals have desires, but it is the structure of our competing desires that allows for the rational agent to per-will one over the other, engaging in a morally significant choice.⁹ God, then, causes all that exists, but He does not cause all that happens. He has set up the workings of the human will so that we can have some ultimate input into how the universe goes.

Note that, while alternative options are required for a *created* agent to choose with aseity, God wills *a se* without having or needing options. It is our created status, where all that we have and are comes from God, which introduces the need for confronting the God-given alternatives, so that *which* alternative we opt for can be truly up to each of us as free agents. God *exists a se* and the introduction of options to the divine will would not enhance *His* aseity one whit. Anselm has it that God is necessarily perfectly good, knows what is best to do, and does it. He rejects the thought that God has to assess His options, perhaps engage in a cost/benefit analysis, or debate Himself about his reasons for doing this over that. A God who dithers is not “that than which no greater can be conceived.”¹⁰

Given the grounding principle how can God possibly know our future free choices? Anselm is arguably the first philosopher to clearly adopt an isotemporal (sometimes called “four-dimensionalist” or “eternalist”) view of time in an effort to solve the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge.¹¹ Which is not to say that Anselm ascribes an eternal existence to God simply to deal with the dilemma. Anselm holds that it is plainly better for God to transcend the limitations imposed by temporality and temporal extension. And the isotemporal theory of time fits well with the classical theist insistence that God is simple, immutable, and utterly unbounded by the spatial and temporal categories of the world He creates. It is icing on the theoretical cake that isotemporalism also allows for a solution to the dilemma of freedom and foreknowledge.

Isotemporalism holds that all times are equally real. What any given, temporally limited, perceiver perceives as present, past, or future, is subjective to that perceiver. (This need not entail that before, after, and simultaneous

with are subjective, and the Christian philosopher would do well to retain the arrow of time.) On isotemporalism, when the time traveler goes from what he takes to be the present to what he took to be the past or future, where he “lands” then becomes his present. Past, present, and future are all “there” and what counts for “now” just depends on what moment of time is in question. The most common alternative to isotemporalism, and the view that open theists defend, is presentism: all that exists is the present moment. And the present moment is simply the extensionless point at which the non-existent future becomes the non-existent past.

On isotemporalism God knows and maintains all times,—or all time, in that time may be more of a continuum than a series of moments—and all that is in them, in His simple, eternal act. Thus God does not *foreknow* some yet to be actualized future. He knows all times immediately. Although I will continue to use the term “foreknowledge,” God has *foreknowledge* only quoad nos. And even bracketing the question of freedom and foreknowledge, the Anselmian insists that having immediate knowledge of, and power over, everything at all the times that ever are—“past,” “present,” and “future” from our perspective at a given time—allows for a much more adequate picture of the divinity than the open theist position where God lives from barely existing moment to barely existing moment.

And now it should be obvious how Anselm’s God can know at t_1 (quoad nos, in that God is not *at* t_1 in the sense of being circumscribed by t_1) what a created agent *S a se* chooses at t_2 . T_1 and t_2 and all the t ’s, are immediately present to God. God knows that *S* chooses *B*—let us say—at t_2 , because *S* chooses *B* at t_2 . From the perspective of one attempting a libertarian theory of created freedom while remaining within the fold of classical theism, it is important to qualify the “because” in the preceding sentence. It is true that in some thin, counterfactual sense, God would not know that *S* chooses *B* at t_2 , were it not the case that *S* chooses *B* at t_2 , and it really is up to *S* to opt for *A* or *B*. But in Anselm’s universe there are two fundamental kinds of genuine *causes*, and it is not right to say that *S*’s choice *causes* God’s knowledge under either species. In Anselm’s universe (unlike in Hume’s) a cause exercises some force or power to produce some effect. Secondary causation is the power that created things can exercise to produce effects upon other created things. The horse may experience a desire to eat which causes it—as a secondary cause—to get moving out to the pasture. But created things cannot bring anything into being out of nothing. We only “rearrange” what is given in the created universe. (Hence Anselm’s *parsimonious* agent causation in which the choice contributed by the agent is not a “thing” with ontological status.) It is God’s primary causation that keeps everything in being from moment to moment, including the secondary causes with their powers. This is what creation *is* according to classical theism.

So, with these two sorts of causation in mind, here is the picture regarding *S* choosing *B* at t_2 . From the perspective of secondary causation we can say that *S*’s desiring both *A* and *B* produces the torn condition, and then

S desires B to the point of ousting the desire for A, and that constitutes the choice. S is a secondary cause. He does not bring anything into being *ex nihilo*.¹² And here is the picture regarding S choosing B at t₂ from the perspective of primary causation. First, at t₁, God, as primary cause, is causing S in TC with respect to A and B. Then, at t₂, God, as primary cause, is causing the continuation of the desire for B and God no longer causes the desire for A. It is absolutely up to S that God is causing the continuation of the desire for B, but God knows that S chooses B at t₂, not because S exercises some sort of causal force or power over God. All of the actual causal force is from the side of God. It is the desires for A and for B that provide the motive power for S's choosing A or choosing B. S, if you will, "channels" that power by per-willing B.¹³ But God is not the passive recipient of a piece of information sent by S. Rather God knows what S does because God knows what He, God, is doing. Someone not in the classical tradition who is content to see God's knowledge acquisition as just passive perception of the sort that the rest of us engage in, only way bigger and better, may find this a peculiar picture. The classical theist responds that a sometime-passive God would seem to be more a citizen within the universe and hence a lesser divinity than the source which keeps it all in being always.

We turn now to objections from the open theist camp. Anselm's analysis of freedom and foreknowledge does mean that it is true at all times, before, during, and after t₂, that "S chooses B at t₂," and some open theists have found this objectionable. Doesn't the principle of alternative possibilities, which is the defining claim of libertarianism, entail that, to be free in choosing B at t₂, S must be able to choose B or to refrain from choosing B at t₂?¹⁴ But if it is true at t₁ (and at all times) that S chooses B at t₂, then S cannot bring it about that he doesn't choose B at t₂. And so, says the open theist, S is not free enough for responsibility. But the Anselmian responds that here is where the thought of *internal* non-causal necessity comes into play. Yes, there is a sort of consequent necessity at work here, "consequent" because it follows upon the positing of the fact.¹⁵ If S chooses B at t₂, then S cannot fail to choose B at t₂. But it is S himself who is the ultimate source of this consequent necessity. S's choosing B at t₂ is not a *cause* of S choosing B at t₂, nor does it involve some non-causal *external* necessity, like the Molinist's counterfactuals of freedom. Were the open theist to insist that even this *internal* non-causal necessity conflicts with the possibility of the alternatives required for freedom, then he should conclude that no one ever makes a free choice at the time he makes the choice. If S chooses B at t₂, then at t₂, S cannot possibly refrain from choosing B. The Anselmian claim is that it is absolutely up to S—without any causal or ENC necessity—to opt for A over B or B over A.¹⁶ If S opts for B at t₂, then S, the agent, makes it the case for all times that S chooses B at t₂. Surely this aseity is enough to ground moral responsibility and the ability to contribute to our own characters. The open theist may look for something more, but it is difficult to see what that more could *add*.

The open theist may simply insist that the ability to choose otherwise not be qualified in any way at all, but, as noted above, logic seems to be against the proposal that the agent could choose otherwise at the moment he chooses. Perhaps the thought is that the agent must, without any qualification at all, be able to choose otherwise *before* he chooses. And so truths about his own future choices conflict with the freedom of those future choices. But again, it is difficult to see what is lost if we say that S's choosing B makes it the case that S chooses B. Or at least, it is difficult to see what is lost that could be important to S's being a self-creating, morally responsible agent. Anselm, it seems to me, has defended a very robust libertarian theory of freedom within the universe of classical theism, in which God knows and causes all that exists at all the times there are, "past," "present," and "future."

But the open theist has a host of criticisms to raise against the Anselmian picture. Some of these criticisms come up in discussing "simple foreknowledge," and it is well to note that not all explications of simple foreknowledge operate within an Anselmian framework. Simple foreknowledge can be thought of as the claim that God knows exhaustively all that has happened, is happening, and will happen, including libertarian free choices, and that His knowledge in no way depends upon any Molinist counterfactuals of freedom. And that certainly describes the Anselmian position. But one could subscribe to simple foreknowledge without taking it that God is eternal—outside of time the way Anselm explains it—and without saying that time is isotemporal.¹⁷ Some who defend simple foreknowledge write as if they were assuming presentism, such that the future is presently non-existent. I have said that Anselm's commitment to aseity entails the grounding principle, and if the truth of, and knowledge about, a choice, depend on the actual making of the choice, it is difficult to see how the presentist defender of simple foreknowledge is to make sense of the claim that God presently knows the truth about future free choices. The defender could say that He inexplicably "just does," and that may be more parsimonious than the Molinist's appeal to the counterfactuals of freedom which are inexplicably "just there," but it is not very satisfying. In that many of the open theist's criticisms of simple foreknowledge in general can also be aimed at the Anselmian position, I will defend Anselm within a classical theist perspective, and proponents of other analyzes of simple foreknowledge will have to fend for themselves.

Defending Anselm does require defending isotemporalism, against which open theists have raised a series of problems. For example, doesn't isotemporalism mean that there is no *change* in the universe? William Hasker writes,

It is important to recognize that *in the four-dimensional continuum nothing changes*. There is "change" only in the sense that a road "changes" as it passes first through farmland, then through forest, then over a river, and at last up into the mountains. The road, of course, doesn't *change* at all, though it has different features at different points along its length. Similarly, the four-dimensional continuum never changes at all, though

different states of affairs obtain at different temporal locations along it. And yet, it is a salient and altogether inescapable feature of our experience that *things do change*.¹⁸

The Anselmian responds that what she understands by “change” is that something is one way at one time and another way at another time, but that happens on isotemporalism. What more is meant by “change”? Could the thought be that presentism captures change better because it takes account of the *flow* of events from the future through the present to the past? But it doesn’t. On presentism the future is non-existent, so no events are there to flow from it. The past is non-existent, so no events flow into it. The present is where two non-existents meet. Indeed, it is puzzling that anything like an event takes place in a presentist universe, since events would seem to be temporally extended.¹⁹

Does isotemporalism somehow undermine personal identity, in that, on at least one way of understanding the view, I exist as a sort of “ribbon” stretched out along all the times at which I exist? Does this mean that “I” am not really here at any given time, since it is just one part or point along the ribbon that is “here” “now”? As Hasker explains it, isotemporalism undermines the person existing as an “immediate experiencer.”²⁰

Well, I don’t see it. Why can’t I say that “I” am here, now, since the present “part” of the whole ribbon which is myself is here, now. Take the analogy with space. I am spatially extended, but it would be odd to say that “I” am not typing, since much of my body—my feet for example—is not engaged in typing. And how is presentism any better on personal identity over time? On presentism there is no continuity between one’s past and one’s present, since one’s past is absolutely non-existent. Existing wholly at this barely existing instant, remembering those earlier experiences, seems a less robust grounding for personal identity over time than the claim that the whole person is a time ribbon, all of which exists with different experiences and different properties at different times. I don’t see that the open theist’s instantaneous self does the job any better than the isotemporalist’s ribbon self.²¹

I grant that it is bizarre to think of oneself a few moments ago and oneself a few moments hence as existing every bit as much as one exists right now, but there is no phenomenologically comfortable theory of time. Presentism would have it that we exist at the unextended point at which the non-existent future becomes the non-existent past. It doesn’t *feel* at all like that to me.²²

So the open theist’s attack on isotemporalism *per se* should not encourage us to abandon the Anselmian reconciliation between libertarian freedom and divine foreknowledge. But here is a different open theist move that addresses the claim that we must ascribe foreknowledge to God in order to ensure His providence. Simple foreknowledge, including Anselm’s version, holds that God knows what actually happens in the future. This is perfectly clear given the grounding principle. God knows that S chooses B at (some

future) t_2 , *only because* S chooses B at t_2 . But then, it is argued, God can't change the future, so it's just useless for Him to have foreknowledge. His knowledge of what is actual does not enable Him to influence how things turn out, since they have already "turned out" so to speak.²³ And it is quite true that God cannot change (what is to some perceiver at some time) the future, any more than He can change the past or the present. What happens at time t_x , happens at time t_x , and cannot be made not to have happened. However, it does not follow that God's power is not enhanced by His having immediate knowledge of and causal access to all of time in His one, eternal act. God cannot *change* what happens, but He can do a great deal to bring about what He wants to bring about—always with the proviso that He does not bring about our *a se* choices.²⁴

Here is an example to illustrate the point. I choose this example so that I can use variations on it in discussing the final two criticisms that I address. The only way to express the example is as a sequence of divine desires and beliefs. This, of course, fails to capture the reality. I take the reality of God's eternal act to be beyond human imagining. The sequence is not a temporal sequence. I will call it a "logical" sequence, although here I am thinking in terms of a sequence where the ordering is more along the lines of what God is trying to achieve and what events will help to achieve it. (Is a means/ends ordering or an ordering in terms of more or less valuable or important a "logical" sequence?) So say that God knows that Peter's faith will be shaken by the death of Christ, and He wants Peter, without much inner doubt, to accept the risen Christ as God Incarnate. And, suppose further that, with an in depth understanding of Peter's psychology, He believes that Peter will, or is more likely to, do this if Peter believes that Christ knows the future. God knows that at a certain time, t_2 , Peter will find himself in the torn condition (TC) regarding whether or not to deny Him, i.e., Christ. God also knows that at t_3 , Peter will deny Him. God cannot *change* what happens at t_2 or t_3 . However, God can bring it about at t_1 that He tells Peter that Peter will deny him at t_3 (before the cock crows). God hasn't *changed* what happens at t_1 . He has just done something at t_1 , in order to bring it about, after t_3 , that Peter will believe that Christ knows the future. If Christ didn't know the future, He wouldn't know what happens at t_3 , and He couldn't use that to present the prophecy at t_1 . But since God *does* know the future, when Peter remembers the prophecy he will believe that Christ knew the future and then accept (or be more likely to accept) the risen Christ as God Incarnate. Being able to act immediately on all of time means that God has a great deal of power to determine how the world shall go. He would have absolute power over the course of things if He had not chosen to create agents with libertarian freedom, but He would have far, far less power if He had created libertarian free agents, but did not know the future and could act only upon the present instant.

I turn now to two final issues which open theists raise against the doctrine of simple foreknowledge and which I have not addressed in past work.

These two issues are nicely expressed by David Hunt in a seminal article, "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge," in the form of two principles which seem to conflict with the ascription to God of simple foreknowledge.²⁵ The first principle, which he labels the Metaphysical Principle (MP), states that, "It is impossible that a decision depend on a belief which depends on a future event which depends on the original decision." It is impossible because it involves a vicious circularity in the order of explanation. Hunt notes that this may be an instance of a more general principle regarding "events" simpliciter, but he chooses to discuss the narrower formulation, as sufficient to the issue of simple foreknowledge. The second principle is the Doxastic Principle (DP), "It is impossible to hold the belief that *p* while deciding to bring it about that *p*."

Let us look at DP first, since it is easy to dismiss from an Anselmian perspective. DP is supposed to raise a difficulty for simple foreknowledge in that, if God knows the future, then He knows His own future actions. A first difficulty is that it looks like God's foreknowledge of His own future action would constitute at least part of the explanation for His making the decision to act, and yet the decision to act is explanatorily prior to the foreknowledge.²⁶ Hunt responds that we need not say that God's reasons for deciding to act include knowledge of His own future action. It may be God's foreknowledge that *q* will occur that constitutes His reason for deciding to bring it about that *p*.²⁷ That seems a correct response to *this* proposed circularity problem (though more will be said about circularity below). But there is a second issue: It appears, *prima facie*, that no one could engage in the process of *deciding* to bring it about that *p*, if he already knows that he does in fact bring it about that *p*. Hunt disputes this appearance, giving the example of the time traveler who may go to the future and come to know that he does indeed commit suicide, and yet subsequently (in his personal time series) go through the decision process which leads him to commit suicide.²⁸

The Anselmian solution is simpler, if more radical. Anselm's God does not make decisions. In His eternal act, He is knowing and doing the best (given the free choices of created agents) because it is the best. If God brings it about that *p* at *t*₁, there is no reason to distinguish any divine knowing or believing that He *will* do it, or that He is *deciding* to do it, from His doing it. God does not *foreknow* His future actions, He just knows what He is doing. It would be odd to insist that His knowing what He is doing *as He does it* constitutes a reason for His "deciding" to do what He is doing, just as it would be odd to insist that your knowing that you are reading now plays a role in your "deciding" to read now. Indeed, if it seems impossible that one might decide to do what one knows one *will* do, it surely *is* impossible to "decide" what to presently be doing as one *presently knows* oneself to be engaged in doing it. Deciding suggests believing, in some way, that one's options are open, but Anselm sees absolutely no theoretical advantage to supposing that God must debate about what to do, nor in holding that God might be doing other than He does.²⁹ God's freedom is not undermined,

since God exists *a se* by His very nature, so what He wills, He wills from Himself.

But denying that God makes “decisions” is not enough to solve the problem posed by the Metaphysical Principle (MP): “It is impossible that a decision depend on a belief which depends on a future event which depends on the original decision.” There may be worrisome loops even if God does not make decisions. Hunt’s response has been to accept MP, but to maintain that foreknowledge can enhance divine power without involving explanatory loops. For example, someone might know that a warrant for his arrest will be issued next week, and thus decide to leave the country tomorrow. The knowledge enhances the agent’s power to determine how things go, but the issuing of the warrant does not depend upon the decision to leave the country. There is no loop. Similarly, the knowledge on which God bases his decisions may be knowledge of events which are not the product of those decisions. Loops are avoided, and nonetheless God’s foreknowledge enhances His power.³⁰

I do not find Hunt’s proposal entirely satisfactory. It seems to me that in the history of the world which the (traditionally minded) Christian accepts, there look to be instances in which God’s knowledge of a future free choice (future, *quoad nos*) explains His bringing something about in the past (*quoad nos*) of that choice, which in turn sets up the conditions for the choice. The problem is seen clearly in certain cases of prophecy, and instances of prophecy are important in the debate over open theism since prophecy provides the classical theist with Scriptural ammunition against the open theists. If MP renders these purported instances of prophecy just impossible, that is a blow to the classical theist. Moreover, the problem of vicious explanatory circles is not limited to instances of prophecy. If we suppose that God’s knowledge of a free choice made at *t*₃ informs what He brings about at *t*₁, with or without prophecy, and *t*₁ constitutes a part of the history of the conditions at *t*₂ and *t*₃ which allow for the choice at *t*₃, it seems that there is something inescapably loopy in the claim that God’s foreknowledge of free choices informs His interactions with the created universe.³¹

I propose to address this problem by arguing that God’s foreknowledge of free choices does involve explanatory loops, but that these loops are not as vicious as they might at first appear. The move will involve denying the claim that if event A explains event B and event B explains A, then we have an inexplicable circle. Where A and B are mutually explanatory, but the existence of the whole circular system itself can be explained by a further cause (or further causes) outside of the system, then there is no vicious circle. There is an explanatory circle, but it is benign.

I think a very good case can be made for benign circularity if we allow God as the primary cause of all that exists. But first, let me try an example which attempts to confine itself to mundane sorts of causes. If this example succeeds, then it may prove useful for distinguishing vicious as opposed to benign explanatory circles. If it fails, then the moral will be that the distinction can be made properly only through an appeal to extra-mundane,

probably divine, causation. But let's give the mundane case a try. So suppose it is a truth about human psychology that some people are capable of recognizing when someone loves them, and that these same people come to love another when they recognize that the other loves them. And suppose that Abelard and Heloise (A and H) are such people. It seems metaphysically possible that the two should recognize the love of the other and come to love simultaneously. So the explanation of A's recognizing H's love and coming to love H is H's recognizing A's love and coming to love A, and vice versa. The explanation for the mutual love is circular, but the whole circular system is (on the mundane level) caused and sustained by the facts of human psychology in addition to all the supporting phenomena—the existence of A and H, gravity, oxygen, etc. etc. etc.

If the critic insists that in human events there must be some time lag which undermines the circularity, then suppose Abelard and Heloise are aliens who can do the recognizing and the loving instantaneously. If the critic then insists that a causal series must be temporally ordered, because causes precede their effects temporally, then, according to the Anselmian, he is just narrow-minded and unfit to discuss how things work in the universe of classical theism. And if this recognizing/loving example is ultimately flawed, that may be due to my hope to construct an example appealing only to mundane sorts of causes, and need not count against my more complex discussion of MP which brings God into the picture.

First it will be well to note that, in the universe of classical theism, MP is pretty obviously false as it stands. In order to show this, I refer to the example of prophecy mentioned above, where Christ tells Peter that he will deny Him. But to make my point about MP clear, I think it is best to engage in a fanciful and somewhat convoluted variant on the example—I see a dumb, but bestselling novel in this—in which Jesus is not God Incarnate. Rather he is (and this is the dark, exciting secret which the Church of Rome has been hiding for lo these many centuries) a TIME TRAVELING SPACE ALIEN! To distinguish this Jesus from the humdrum Hypostatic Union, call him Time-travelling Jesus or TJ for short. Now say that TJ at t_1 wants a couple of things to happen in the future. He expects to be taken prisoner and killed and will use his alien powers to come back from the dead. So he wants (1) that upon his resurrection Peter will believe that he, TJ, is God Incarnate. (This is, of course, contrary to fact. TJ's moral compass does not point true north.) He also wants (2) that when he is taken prisoner Peter will find himself in the torn condition regarding whether or not to deny him. (TJ, for the sake of the example, recognizes the truth of Anselmian libertarianism.)

TJ knows he cannot bring it about that Peter freely denies him or freely stays true to him, but he is a very powerful and knowledgeable alien and rightly believes that he will be able to bring it about that Peter is in TC with regard to denying him. Why might he want to do that? Perhaps part of his nefarious plot—ironically he is in cahoots with the Roman Church—is to

found a Church which believes him to be God Incarnate. He chooses Peter to be its leader. And he holds that it will be a solace and strength to adherents of that Church for millennia if they know that even the great Rock upon which the Church is built was sorely tested regarding an important, freely made decision. If Peter does not deny him, great, but if he *does* deny him, maybe it is even better for the future of the Church. Her members will see (or at least they ought to see) that commitment to Her should not rest on a naïve belief in the constant and superhuman piety of Her leaders. So it is very important to TJ that Peter be in TC regarding the denial.

Now say that TJ at t1 is waiting around for his disciples to arrange for the room where he may eat the Passover with them. (The times, t1, t2 and so forth, will not be very precise and may cover long stretches of time. I include them just to make sure of the sequence in which things happen from the perspective of HST—human standard time as everybody who is not TJ experiences it. In TJ's personal time the events occur in the order in which they are listed below.)³² While he waits, TJ decides to exercise his time traveling powers (with the addition of some space traveling powers as well) and goes forward to t6 after he has been captured. Hiding behind a barrel in Caiaphas' courtyard he sees himself and he sees some folks accusing Peter of being his follower. And then, at t7, he sees—he also happens to be able to read minds—that Peter is in TC regarding denying him. And then, a moment later at t8, he observes Peter's denial.

Now he travels back to the moment after t1, i.e., t2. (An observer might not have seen even a flicker as TJ left at t1 and returned the next moment. He could have traveled back to t1 to watch himself leave, but what would be the point?) And now, at dinner at t3, TJ observes Peter's state of mind and sees that, as things stand, it will be psychologically impossible for Peter to later find himself in TC regarding the denial. Say that TJ recognizes that Peter's psychological state is such that, were he to remain in that same condition, he would be unable to refrain—as a matter of causal necessity—from simply bolting when the Temple guards show up. TJ sees that he needs to implant in Peter's mind the thought that he *might* deny him, since he knows that the addition of that thought will be enough to cause Peter to work up the courage to follow along to Caiaphas's courtyard and find himself in TC regarding the denial. (There is no problem with Peter's activities being causally determined up through TC.)

But TJ also wants Peter to believe that he, TJ, can see the future. (Which he can.) And so he chooses, at t4, to tell Peter the truth. Not only *could* Peter deny him, but he *will* deny him. TJ knows that Peter will not really believe the prophecy when it is given, and moreover that he will forget it in the stress of the moment (Matthew 26 supports both claims). And, in any case, Peter is not much of a metaphysician. So the doxastic problem will not arise regarding Peter's decision. At t4 TJ utters his prophecy to Peter, implanting in his mind the thought of the denial. This thought, as Peter entertains it, is just a thought that he *might* deny Christ, but, as TJ foreknew, this addition

to Peter's psyche is enough to guarantee that he will find himself in Caiaphas's courtyard in TC regarding the denial.

TJ is captured at t5, and at t6, after the capture, Peter follows along to the courtyard. At t7 he finds himself in TC, struggling between his desire to deny TJ and his desire to remain true. When he denies TJ at t8, and the cock crows, he remembers the prophecy. This memory will, after TJ's "resurrection," be among the causes which produce in him the belief that TJ is God Incarnate. (Peter does not consider the more obvious explanation that TJ is a time traveling space alien.) Having observed what Peter chooses at t8, TJ is able to bring about the two events that he wants to bring about, by uttering the prophecy at t4. This is a story in which a decision (TJ's at t4 to utter the prophecy) depends upon a belief ("Peter will deny me at t8") which depends upon an event (Peter's denial at t8) which depends upon the original decision.³³ (Had TJ not decided to utter the prophecy at t4 Peter would—as a matter of causal necessity—just have bolted. He would never have been in TC at t7, and that would have made it impossible for him to deny TJ at t8.)

MP would have it that this scenario is just impossible. Supporters of MP are willing to weaken it a bit and allow that, while loops of this sort might be barely and brutally possible, they would nonetheless be inexplicable.³⁴ To accept such a loop may seem violate the principle of sufficient reason (PSR). The Anselmian, like most classical theists, finds PSR extremely plausible and extremely useful, and would be loathe to abandon it. My hope is to defend the explicability of the TJ scenario, and then revert to the Christian picture of Peter's denial and try to defend the explicability of that as well.

The TJ scenario—while it does involve a causal loop—is fully explicable if we locate it within the universe of classical theism. In the Anselmian universe, recall, there are two fundamental types of causes: secondary and primary causation. The causal circle described in the TJ scenario consists entirely of secondary causes. Secondary causes are contingent phenomena. Even a perfectly "straight" chain of secondary causes stretching from the Big Bang to the present is inexplicable in itself, since it is composed of nothing but contingency. In order to explain the existence and operation of any secondary causes at all, one must invoke primary causation which is what makes things to exist. Since primary causation is God's causation, and God is a necessary being, primary causation gives us a complete explanation for everything that exists—is a real being with ontological status—in the chain of secondary causes. (Primary causation does not explain why Peter chose denial over staying true. Peter, the agent, caused that. But primary causation explains the existence of Peter with his ability to per-will, and it explains the existence of the competing desires when Peter is in TC, and the continued existence of Peter's desire to deny, when Peter has per-willed that desire, over his desire to stay true.) We might add that "God wills it so" or that "God, seeing it is the best, wills it so," but this is just spelling out what primary causation means.

God does not need the historic chain of causes from the Big Bang in order to bring about a system of secondary causation. Had He happened to want

to He could bring a new chicken into being *ex nihilo* today, without any secondary causal history, and start it laying eggs, producing more chickens and eggs. It is unlikely that He would do so, since the evidence is that He really *likes* to bring things about through the secondary causal processes He sustains. But He could.³⁵ Similarly, were TJ to go about his shenanigans in Anselm's universe, each step in the causal loop would have the explanation given in the story, and the loop as a whole would be kept in being by God's primary causation. We know that God can keep the whole loop in being because He could keep any individual 'moment' of the loop or any particular set of moments in being without needing the rest of the loop. (He could not make Peter *freely* choose to deny rather than not, but He could keep in being all that has ontological status in Peter's denial.)

Now let us return to the Christian story. Jesus Christ knows the future in that, though He is constituted by two natures, human and divine, He is the same person as the Second Person of the Trinity. (This is, of course, an extremely difficult dogma, and different philosophers have analyzed it in different ways. Anselm's position is that Christ's human intellect and will are informed by His divine intellect and will in such a way that He can know the future and will only what is best.)³⁶ And let us say that Peter's psychology is roughly the same as in the TJ scenario. And let us say that Christ intends to bring about consequences similar to the two that TJ had in mind. He wants to bring it about that Peter is in TC with regard to denying Him since that will ultimately strengthen the foundation of the Church. And He wants to bring it about that, after the resurrection, Peter is sure that He is God Incarnate. So, knowing that Peter will in fact deny Him, He utters the prophecy in order to set up the situation in which, rather than bolting, Peter finds himself in TC in Caiaphas's courtyard, and Peter denies Christ.

First we need to sort out what, in this story, is secondary and what is primary causation. The "uttering" of the prophecy must be done by Christ in His human nature, since one utters with one's mouth, so the uttering seems to be an event within the chain of secondary causation. Christ takes a breath, opens his mouth, and speaks. Peter's coming to think about the possibility of denying Christ and his subsequently finding himself in TC with regard to the denial is part of the chain of secondary causes. Peter's ultimate denial, that is the opting for denying or staying true, is by hypothesis a free, that is, *a se* choice, and so it is just Peter per-willing the desire to deny to the point where it becomes an intention and the desire to remain true ceases to be viable. So Peter's per-willing is secondary causation, just the way any creature willing anything would be.

But now things get complicated, since we cannot say that Peter's per-willing *causes* God's knowledge of Peter's denial through secondary causation. As discussed above, secondary causation does not exert any *force* or *power* against God, such that God's knowledge could be an effect of secondary causation. God's knowledge and His causation are the same, and He knows that Peter chooses to deny Christ because He is keeping the desire to deny in being. Had

Peter per-willed to stay true, then God would have been keeping the desire to stay true in being. The contingent phenomenon of Peter per-willing to deny Christ is caused by Peter, but God's knowledge is caused by His primary causation of Peter's desire to deny, which is in turn caused by His setting up the system in order to allow created agents to make *a se* choices, because it is *best* that the universe contain responsible created agents who can help in their own creation.

Must we say that God's knowledge of Peter's choice is somehow contingent? I am not sure. God could have been knowing and doing otherwise, so perhaps we need to allow this element of contingency in the divine nature. And His knowledge is counterfactually dependent on what Peter per-wills. But we do not need to say that God's knowledge is an *effect* in the secondary chain of causes. The secondary chain of causes consists in Christ's uttering the prophecy, Peter's considering the denial, Peter being in TC, and then Peter denying Christ. And whatever exists—that is, whatever has genuine ontological status—in this whole secondary chain is made to exist by God as primary cause. It is similar to the case above when we envisioned the TJ scenario in the universe of classical theism. So there is no circle of causation, since secondary causes cannot have an impact on the order of primary causation. There is a circle of explanatory dependency in that God's knowledge of what Peter freely chooses, and hence Christ's utterance regarding Peter's denial, which prophecy sets up the conditions for the denial, all depend upon Peter's per-willing to deny Christ. But Peter's per-willing to deny rather than stay true is absolutely up to Peter, and does not bring anything into being, while all that has ontological status in the circle is dependent upon God's primary causation. That is, the *existence* of the whole circle is dependent upon God's primary causation, as much as in the TJ scenario. If the problem of vicious circularity has to do with explaining how and why things exist, then I believe that *vicious* circularity is avoided.

Anselm set himself the very difficult task of defending libertarian freedom for created agents within the universe of classical theism. This entails defending our free choice, even though God knows what it is we will do tomorrow and may even act to produce the conditions under which we do it. Open theists have aimed many criticisms at variations on this Anselmian theme, but it is possible to respond to them. It is, perhaps, easier to wrap our minds around the open theist's God, who is much more like us than is Anselm's God. But any *easily* conceivable God is not likely to fit the description of "that than which no greater can be conceived."³⁷

Notes

1. I try to make this case in *Anselm on Freedom* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008) and in *Freedom and Self-Creation: Anselmian Libertarianism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015). The former makes the historical case, while the latter brings Anselm's basic schema into the contemporary free will debate.

2. Rogers, *Freedom and Self-Creation*, 109–116.
3. *Ibid.*, 117–126, 216–238.
4. Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii*, 8.
5. Anselm, *De casu diaboli*, 13–14; Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, chapters 4 and 5. Here I made the mistake of referring to human agency as “primary causation”, but I have since recognized that, for Anselm, human choice does not bring anything into being, so it should not be so labeled.
6. *De casu diaboli*, 8.
7. Rogers, *Freedom and Self-Creation*, chapter 3.
8. *Ibid.*, 97–100. See also my, “Anselm on the Ontological Status of Choice,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 52 (2012): 183–197.
9. Anselm himself proposes a nested hierarchy of desires in which justice is a second order desire to pursue the appropriate first order desires. Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 66–72.
10. Rogers, *Freedom and Self-Creation*, chapter 10.
11. Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, chapter 9; See also my, “Anselmian Eternalism: The Presence of a Timeless God,” *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007): 3–27.
12. As mentioned in footnote 5, in Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, I attributed the power of primary causation to created agents, and that was a mistake on my part.
13. Rogers, *Freedom and Self-Creation*, 93, 97–98.
14. This is a point that William Hasker makes in many of his works. See, for example, the debate between Hasker and myself titled, “Anselm and the Classical Idea of God: A Debate,” in *Philosophy of Religion: Key Thinkers*, ed. Jeffrey J. Jordan (London: Continuum, 2011), 7–21.
15. Anselm sets this out in his *De Concordia*, 1.2–3.
16. Anselmian libertarianism, then, accepts the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP) as long as the principle allows that the agent himself, by choosing one of the open possibilities, makes it the case that that is the chosen possibility.
17. David Hunt notes the two ways of thinking of God’s knowledge of the “future,” and holds that his defense of simple foreknowledge applies to both, “The Providential Advantage of Divine Foreknowledge,” in *Arguing About Religion*, ed. Kevin Timpe (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 374–385, at 383–384, n.1.
18. From a debate on “God and Time” that Hasker and I were to present at the annual meeting of the Society for Philosophy of Religion, 2015. The two sides were presented, but unfortunately Hasker himself was unable to come due to inclement weather. I will refer to material from this debate by the title, “Debate 2015.”
19. Rogers, “Debate 2015.”
20. Hasker, “Debate 2015.”
21. Rogers, “Debate 2015.”
22. *Ibid.* It is pleasant to note that contemporary physics apparently supports isomorphism, though I hesitate to tie metaphysics too closely to the science of the day. Should the physicists decide, next year, that presentism is correct, I would not find that sufficient reason to change my mind.
23. William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 53–63.
24. Rogers, “Anselmian Eternalism,” 19–21.
25. David Hunt, “Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge,” *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993): 394–414, at 398–399.
26. William Hasker, “Why Simple Foreknowledge Is Still Useless,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52, no. 3 (2009): 537–544, at 539–540.
27. David Hunt, “Why Simple Foreknowledge Is Still Useful,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52, no. 3 (2009): 545–550, at 548.
28. *Ibid.*, 549.

29. Thomas Aquinas is famously a theist compatibilist when it comes to human choices; God causes them all. But he holds that God could have done other than He does. In his day the thought that God “must” do the best is inevitably linked with Averroism, which advanced a cluster of unwholesome claims, such as that God does not know individuals and does not enter history to take action in the created universe. But Averroism is no longer the fashion in academia, and the thought that God “must” do the best need not lead to these unwanted conclusions. In classical theism God is taken to be the absolute standard for value, and the thought that He might need to wonder what He ought to do is, from that perspective, just puzzling. If the worry is that God would not be praiseworthy if He inevitably did the best, I propose an Anselmian response in “Anselm on Praising a Necessarily Perfect Being,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 34 (August, 1993): 41–52.
30. Hunt, “Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge,” 401, 405.
31. One central example is the Incarnation. Anselm himself introduces a very interesting discussion of the problem of “backwards causation” when he argues that the Blessed Virgin Mary is rendered free of original sin through her faith in the future saving work of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection. *De casu diaboli*, 2.16.
32. For HST versus personal time see Rogers, “Anselmian Eternalism,” 15.
33. This does not constitute a perfectly closed causal loop, since Peter is free with libertarian freedom. His causal agency contributes something not caused by a previous event in the loop. I am not sure whether or not this makes much of a difference to the worry about loops or to my attempt to answer the worry. The prophecy is dependent on the fact of the denial, and it is the prophecy that sets up the conditions which make the denial possible.
34. Hunt, “Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge,” 407.
35. He could, bracketing His perfect goodness. “Could” here refers to what is metaphysically possible for divine omnipotence. If it is not best to bring chickens into being today *ex nihilo*, then God doesn’t do it. God’s evident fondness for secondary causation is the key to classical theism’s response to the problem of natural evil. Why is it that God lets the lion eat the lamb and the fawn burn in the forest? Because it is a great good that created things exercise (secondary) causal powers. God may interfere with the operations of nature from time to time, but He won’t interfere much. See my *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 113–118, 149–152.
36. See, for example, *Cur Deus Homo*, book 2, chapter 8.
37. I thank my student Thomas DePietro for introducing me to the circularity problem and for his very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper which led to significant improvements.

7 On Open Theism Either God Has False Beliefs, or I Can Know Something That God Cannot¹

Robert B. Stewart

I'd like to know that your love
Is love I can be sure of
So tell me now, and I won't ask again
Will you still love me tomorrow?
"Will You Love Me Tomorrow"
Gerry Goffin and Carole King

The thesis of this paper is that on open theism either God has some false beliefs or I can have propositional knowledge of something that God does not know. If I am correct on either point, then God is not omniscient. I am defining omniscience thus: S is *omniscient* =_{df} for every proposition p , if p is true then S knows p , and if p is false then S does not believe p .²

I first entertained this thesis after some reflection on open theism following the annual Evangelical Theological Society meeting in Colorado Springs in 2001. At that meeting Bruce Ware argued in his plenary address that on open theism God holds numerous false beliefs at any given time.³ Open theists John Sanders and Gregory Boyd quickly responded that God as conceived by open theists does not hold false beliefs; however, they did grant that God expected some things to come to pass that in fact would not come to pass (due to human freedom), and that when these events did not come to pass, God was indeed (mildly) surprised. Nevertheless, according to Boyd and Sanders, events like these do not constitute false beliefs on God's part.⁴

But why such a vigorous response from Boyd and Sanders in the first place? The answer is that like most open theists they affirm the concept of divine omniscience. In *God of the Possible* Boyd states:

The careful reader may have already discerned a subtle but very important point regarding this debate about God's foreknowledge—namely, it is not really about God's knowledge at all. It is rather a debate about the nature of the future. Though open theists are often accused of denying God's omniscience because they deny the classical view of foreknowledge, this criticism is unfounded. Open theists affirm God's omniscience

as emphatically as anybody does. The issue is not whether God's knowledge is perfect. It is. The issue is about the nature of the reality that God perfectly knows. More specifically, what is the content of the reality of the future? Whatever it is, we all agree that God perfectly knows it.⁵

Open theists affirm that God knows all that can be known—at any given time. But since the future does not fully exist, those parts that do not yet exist cannot be known at this time by anyone—including God. This 'inability' is no more a deficiency on God's part than his inability to do the logically impossible. Apparently open theists also reject the idea that someone who holds a false belief doesn't qualify as omniscient.

In response to Ware's charge, both Sanders and Boyd offer an analysis of what would need to be the case in order to rightly predicate false belief(s) to God. Sanders states:

[F]or God to be mistaken or to hold a false belief, it would have to be the case that God "declared infallibly that something would come to pass and it did not. God would never be mistaken so long as he never said that X (for example, Adam will not sin) would infallibly come to pass and it did not." God will not *definitely believe* that something will occur unless it is *certain* to occur. If an event is not certain to occur, then God knows the degree of probability that something will happen in a particular way. But God will not hold that belief as absolutely certain if human freedom is involved, because our decisions, though somewhat predictable, are not absolutely so. . . . In such cases, we may say that God was "surprised" at what happened, but it would be incorrect to say God held a false belief.⁶

Boyd comments:

When God says he "thought" or "expected" something would take place that did not take place, he is simply reflecting his perfect knowledge of probabilities. When the improbable happens, as sometimes is the case with free agents, God genuinely says he "thought" or "expected" the more probable would happen. Because God is infinitely intelligent, we cannot conceive of God being altogether shocked, as though he did not perfectly anticipate and prepare for this very improbability (as much as if it was a certainty from all eternity). But relative to the probabilities of the situation, the outcome was surprising [viz. improbable].⁷

Let us consider Sanders's response first. Sanders insists that God holds no belief on a future matter unless he has "declared infallibly" that something will come to pass. Taken at face value the statement, "God declared infallibly that something would come to pass and it did not" is self-referentially incoherent. If God declares infallibly that *p*, then *p*. If an event is necessary, then

it is necessary, and thus cannot *not* take place. But I don't think that Sanders intends to refer to an event that cannot *not* take place not taking place. I think he probably intended to say that God must be 100% certain that an event will take place before he will believe that it will take place. I'm not certain what *declaring* a belief has to do with anyone, God included, having a belief.

Very few would accept that 100% certainty concerning an event is required for one to believe a proposition related to said event. Requiring that a proposition be held "infallibly," or as certain, before it can count as belief raises the bar too high. If this degree of certainty is required in order to believe a proposition, then we could never have any historical or scientific knowledge. Fortunately one need not have 100% confidence concerning the truthfulness of a proposition to believe it reasonably or for one's belief to be justified, and all the more for simply believing a proposition without adequate warrant and/or justification. Someone who believes a proposition to be true (or false) with less than 100% certainty holds a belief—it's false to say she doesn't have a belief since she isn't certain. Rather, she simply believes what she believes with less than 100% certainty. Such a position, which seems to be what Sanders argues for, is a false dilemma. Most of what we know, we believe with less than 100% certainty; but for anything that we know, we have corresponding beliefs.

Consider an analogy: at this moment, as I am typing these words, I have a fairly high degree of certainty, but not 100% certainty, that my computer will continue to operate as it should. Nevertheless I *believe* that it will—even though I know, based on reports from others and from personal experience, that computers sometimes crash or lock up. It is incorrect to say that I lack the belief that my computer is sufficiently reliable to serve my purposes. I demonstrate my belief by continuing to type on it although I remain aware of the possibility that it might fail for one reason or another.

How is one to test whether or not another person has a belief? Perhaps there is no way to know with certainty whether or not another person holds a belief. But of course, if that is true, then open theists cannot deny that God has false beliefs any more than traditional theists can insist that on open theism God does, though open theists can reasonably insist that the traditional theist cannot know that on open theism God has false beliefs.

But none of us actually believes that we can never know whether another person has a belief. It is obvious that at least we can sometimes know that someone else holds a belief because we can know that someone else knows something—and belief is entailed by knowledge. I know for instance that Stephen Hawking knew more about math than I do. I also know that my wife, a former physics teacher, knows more about math than I do—and relevant to this discussion I know that she knows that she knows about more math than I, and thus I know that she believes that she knows more about math than I.

How exactly are we to know that a being such as God (conceived as open theists do) has a belief? I concur with H.H. Price in holding that one

characteristic of belief is that one would be surprised if it failed to be true.⁸ This is interesting. Open theists maintain that God “expects” some things to come to pass and is “mildly surprised” when they do not. Is it reasonable to hold on the one hand that he is surprised but that he holds no belief concerning that about which he is surprised? I think not. To be fair, Price was referring to *dispositional* belief in this section of his Gifford lectures, and that category of belief may not apply to God. Nevertheless it seems reasonable to think that persons, even divine persons, when surprised are surprised because something they *believed would come to pass* did not come to pass. It’s more than just puzzling to think that even though God expected something to occur which did not, in fact, occur, such expectations don’t amount to false beliefs. In other words, surprise is just as much a mark of occurrent belief as it is of dispositional belief.

Price noted another characteristic of belief: “If circumstances were to arise in which it made a practical difference whether *p* was true or false, he would act as it were true.”⁹ This fits perfectly well with open theism since advocates of openness theology maintain that God acts on his expectations.¹⁰

If Price is correct on either or both of these points, why should we believe that God’s expectations are not beliefs? At the very least it seems that open theists owe us an explanation. Apart from such an explanation for why expectations don’t amount to beliefs, critics of open theism seem perfectly justified in suggesting that Boyd and Sanders are committed to the idea that God held false beliefs, despite their protestations to the contrary.

If God’s expectations are indeed beliefs, then clearly, on open theism, at least some of the time these expectations amount to false beliefs. Therefore, on open theism God cannot be omniscient.

Perhaps Boyd’s response sheds some light on what Sanders is intending to say. Boyd states: “When God says he ‘thought’ or ‘expected’ something would take place that did not take place, he is simply reflecting his perfect knowledge of probabilities.”¹¹ In other words, God does not believe that any particular future conditional proposition is true or false but rather God believes that it is probable that that proposition is (or will be) either true or false. God’s “surprise” indicates that the improbable took place rather than the probable—not that what God believed was not true. His belief was thus related not to the truth-value of the proposition itself but to the probability of the proposition. So concerning a belief about a future free human choice God would not believe *that p* but he would believe *that it is probable that p*.

If this is what Boyd intends, then clearly God has beliefs that are in some way related to propositions about the probability of another proposition related to a future free human choice but God would have no belief about any proposition related to a future free human choice. Given that God is a perfect judge of probabilities none of his beliefs about probabilities is false. Therefore when God knows that the probability of a particular event coming to pass is 0, then he also believes not-*p*, and when he knows that the probability of a particular event coming to pass is 1, then he also believes *p*. But

in cases where free will is involved the probability will never rise to 1 or fall to 0, and thus God will never have a belief about these propositions, however probable or improbable they may be. But I must say that it seems to me that when it comes to epistemology, the *God Who Risks* is decidedly risk-averse. Furthermore, if p is 85% likely and $\sim p$ is 15% likely, then the only responsible way to interpret the notion of expectation is to assume that God expects p . Given that God is perfectly rational, this makes sense on Boyd's analysis of open theism. But it still requires that God believe that p is going to obtain, otherwise it's false to suggest that God expects that p .

At first glance Boyd's position appears to deal nicely with the apparent problem of God on open theism having false beliefs, but in doing so it creates an equally significant problem. If this is indeed what open theists believe concerning God's beliefs about future conditional propositions, then I can believe some propositions that God cannot, or at least will not, believe. It would seem then that I am also able to believe a number of *true* propositions that God cannot believe. And I can also *justifiably* believe a number of true propositions that God cannot believe. And if I can justifiably believe a single true proposition that God does not believe, then I can know something that God does not know.

For example, I know that my wife will love me tomorrow. Open theists insist that love must be a free act on the part of the one loving or it is not truly love. In other words, I am claiming to have the exact sort of knowledge of the future that open theists typically insist God cannot have—knowledge of a future free human choice. If I can indeed know that my wife will love me tomorrow, all hope seems lost for open theism.

Charity demands that I challenge my own claim. But how exactly am I to do so? I cannot doubt that I believe that my wife will love me tomorrow. I would bet my life on it. I believe that my wife will love me tomorrow. Is my belief justified? Again, I have the utmost confidence that it is. I have abundant evidence that my wife loves me. We have been married for over thirty years; she has demonstrated her love in more ways than I can count. That I have a justified belief is beyond doubt.

It seems then that the only option at hand is to argue that my belief is not true. There are two ways to argue that a proposition is not true. One is to insist that it is false. This is possibly so—it is possible that my wife will not love me tomorrow—but I cannot imagine anyone who examines the evidence that would believe the claim to be *determinately* false. Another way to challenge the truth of a claim is to argue that the belief, or more precisely the proposition that is believed—in this case, the proposition that my wife will love me tomorrow—is neither true nor false, i.e., it is a sentence without a truth-value. In fact, this is the way that at least some open theists will argue that I cannot know that my wife will love me tomorrow. And one could argue for all-falsism by suggesting that, on the basis of open futurism, all propositions concerning future contingents that involve “will” and “will not” language are *indeterminately* false. But on either of the no truth-value view or all-falsism, I am not sure how well these lines of argument fare when

open theists need to explain to their spouses that they don't know—in fact, cannot know—that they will love them tomorrow.

These objections—that propositions about future free choices have no truth-value, or that open futurism entails indeterminate all-falsism—rule out one claim that is sometimes heard from at least some open theists: namely, that God could know the future, but he restricts his knowledge in order to allow for human freedom. This position is ruled out because if God *could know* future free human choices, then propositions related to future free human choices *have* truth-values.

There are at least two ways to challenge the claim that the proposition that “my wife will love me tomorrow” has no truth-value, or is indeterminately false. The first is to address the claim directly and demonstrate that it is false; in this case that would mean showing how propositions relating to future free human choices can be grounded in the past or the present. The second is to address the claim indirectly and show that it leads to an unacceptable conclusion. I will take the second, or indirect, route.

In order to do this, I have to identify the basis of the open theist's objection. It appears to me that open theists like Boyd and Sanders are working from either a correspondence or a deflationary theory of truth¹² and a presentist or growing block theory of time.¹³ On the basis of these two positions they appeal to something akin to the “Grounding Objection” so frequently discussed when talking about Molinism. I understand them to be arguing that there is nothing metaphysically to “ground” the truth of propositions concerning future free human choices. In other words, such propositions do not correspond to any actual state of affairs—and thus they have no truth-maker.¹⁴

As mentioned earlier it seems that open theists presuppose some sort of correspondence or deflationary theory of truth, though open theism *per se* does not explicitly hold to any theory of truth, so far as I know. I say this because the objection that the future doesn't exist seems relevant only if a true statement was one that corresponded to, or presupposed, the way things are, i.e., some particular state of affairs.

But there are other theories of truth available to consider. I don't know how the open theist's objection that future free human choices have no truth-values holds should one apply a coherence theory of truth, such that:

A statement is true IFF it coheres with all true statements.

I can't think of any true belief that I hold, or anyone else holds, that conflicts with the proposition, “my wife (Marilyn Stewart) will love me (Bob Stewart) tomorrow.” So, on a coherence theory of truth, can I not reasonably claim to know that my wife will love me tomorrow?

Nor do I see how the open theist's objection that future free human choices have no truth-values holds should one apply a pragmatic theory of truth, such that:

A statement, *p*, is true IFF believing that *p* is pragmatic.

I know that it is at least useful for me to believe that my wife will love me tomorrow. Believing my wife will love me tomorrow is also useful for everyone I know who has a stake in the matter. Furthermore, nobody seems to benefit from believing that my wife will not love me tomorrow. On a pragmatic theory of truth, I seem to have a reasonable claim. Coherence and pragmatist theories of truth are just two of many theories of truth that could easily come to bear in relation to the question of whether I can know that my wife will love me tomorrow.

I am not trying to argue that either a coherence or pragmatic theory of truth is correct. I am merely trying to point out something about my belief that my wife will love me tomorrow, namely that on some theories of truth I am making a fairly strong claim and that those who depend on something like a correspondence theory of truth, as Boyd and Sanders seem to do, may be assuming too much. At the very least can we not say that I have a justified belief about the future that is coherent and useful that on open theism God cannot or will not have? Does this sound like something we would want to say about the greatest possible knower? I think not.

But the situation is not this rosy. Even if I cannot know something that God cannot know, on open theism I can know something *before* God knows it. Chronologically speaking, on open theism, I believe at *t*₁ a proposition, *that p*, which will be true at *t*₂. Chronologically speaking, on open theism, God believes *that p* at *t*₂. Obviously my believing at *t*₁ that *p* is chronologically prior to God's believing at *t*₂ *that p*. But, on open theism, my knowing *that p* is not only chronologically prior to God's knowing *that p*. My true belief *that p* is also *logically prior* to God's knowing *that p* in that there is no logical step between the truth of *that p* and my knowing *that p* because I *already* believe *that p*. God, on open theism, has to wait until *t*₂ for *p* to be true before he will believe *that p*, and he cannot know *that p* without first believing *that p*. In other words my belief at *t*₁ *that p* becomes my knowing *that p* instantly as soon as *that p* becomes true at *t*₂. On the other hand, God's knowing *that p* is logically posterior to the truth of *that p* since God's belief *that p* is logically posterior to the truth of *that p*. My belief, on open theism, is logically anterior to the truth of *that p*. So I know *that p* logically prior to God's knowing *that p*.¹⁵

Perhaps I don't need to claim that on open theism I know something that God cannot know. Maybe I don't even need to claim that on open theism I can know something logically prior to the greatest possible knower's knowledge of the same. At the very least it seems, on open theism, that I can still do something of epistemic significance that God cannot. What exactly is this that I can do? At this moment, on open theism I can *justifiably believe* a coherent and useful proposition that *will be true*—that God cannot—at this moment—believe. He can only believe that such a proposition is probable; he cannot believe *the proposition itself*. Therefore I can believe that which God will eventually

believe before he does.¹⁶ On open theism this does not constitute knowledge but surely it is epistemically significant. This seems counterintuitive.

Of course, open theists can avoid this conclusion simply by saying that God does have beliefs concerning propositions that relate to future free human choices. But I doubt very much that they will want to do that because that then puts them back on the spot to show how it is that God has only true beliefs and is also mildly surprised when something he believed was going to happen doesn't (or vice versa). Even if open theists retort with talk of God's beliefs being based on probabilities, it remains to be seen how God can expect certain outcomes without having beliefs about which of multiple possible outcomes will occur. To clarify, it seems that in order for God to be genuinely surprised that p obtains, it must be that case that God believe that p would, in fact, occur. None of this changes if p is 85% likely and $\sim p$ is only 15% likely. If $\sim p$ obtains, then God is surprised, since it was only 15% likely. But God's being surprised amounts to a belief about a future contingency, not merely a belief about probabilities.¹⁷

So where does this leave us? We are faced with a dilemma. If God has beliefs about future free human choices, then on open theism, God has some false beliefs. If God does not presently have beliefs about future free human choices but will have at some point in the future, then it seems that I can presently know something that he cannot know at this time, or I can know something logically prior to God's knowing it. Even if I am mistaken on both these points, it remains that I can justifiably believe a proposition that will be true, is coherent, and is useful prior to God believing it. These positions are counterintuitive at best and absurd at worst.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Benjamin Arbour and Raymond Blaine Stewart for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.
2. The definition I am using here is from Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 26. I am speaking as though God certainly has beliefs. Of course, some philosophers have challenged that contention. For an insightful brief discussion of this issue, see William P. Alston, "Does God Have Beliefs?" *Religious Studies* 22 (1986): 287–306. Obviously, if God has no beliefs at all, then he has no false beliefs. In this essay I will stipulate that God has beliefs, even though I am agnostic on the matter.
3. Bruce Ware, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Theologically: Is Open Theism Evangelical?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (June 2002): 197.
4. John Sanders, "Be Wary of Ware: A Reply to Bruce Ware," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (June 2002): 223–224; Gregory A. Boyd, "Christian Love and Academic Dialogue: A Reply to Bruce Ware," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (June 2002): 237.
5. Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 15–16.
6. John Sanders, "Be Wary of Ware: A Reply to Bruce Ware," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (June 2002): 224. Open theism is not

monolithic. I will focus my thoughts on Gregory Boyd and John Sanders. Of course, my conclusions, if correct, will be relevant to any open theists who think similarly to Boyd and Sanders.

7. Gregory A. Boyd, "Christian Love and Academic Dialogue: A Reply to Bruce Ware," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 2 (June 2002): 237.
8. H.H. Price, *Belief* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1969), 20.
9. *Ibid.*, 20.
10. For example, see Boyd's well-known story of Suzanne, where God leads her to marry a man who will later prove unfaithful and abusive. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 103–106.
11. Boyd, "Christian Love and Academic Dialogue," 237.
12. Perhaps an open theist could hold to a deflationary theory of truth. Deflationary theories do not deny that propositions reflect reality. Rather, those who defend deflationary theories of truth deny that the predicate "is true" adds anything to the proposition *that P*. Without entering into a long, distracting discussion, suffice it to say that both correspondence and deflationary theories of truth hold that truth supervenes on being, i.e., purport to describe reality as it is.
13. Or some other theory of time that denies the ontological reality of the future.
14. Of course, Trenton Merricks has addressed these issues in his *Truth and Ontology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009). Cf. also Thomas M. Crisp, "Presentism and the Grounding Objection," *Nous* 41, no. 1 (2007): 90–109.
15. For a different set of puzzles that mirror some of these issues, see Benjamin H. Arbour, "When Does God Know? Open Theism, Simultaneous Causation, and Divine Knowledge of the Present," in *God, Mind, and Knowledge*, ed. Andrew Moore (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), 103–120.
16. One might appeal to divine infallibility in an effort to stave off concerns here. After all, I can believe fallibly, since it might turn out that I'm wrong (given the probabilities). Alternatively, given divine infallibility, God cannot believe this until the probabilities are settled. While this relieves some of the tension, it does not alleviate the tension entirely, since I'm still capable of believing something that will become true logically and chronologically prior to God. This certainly counts as epistemically significant activity, and a perfect being ought not be outperformed by a less-than-perfect being on these fronts.
17. David Hunt has argued similarly in responding to Greg Boyd's open theism. Cf. "A Simple-Foreknowledge Response," in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, eds. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 50–53.

Part III

Open Theism and Other Issues in Philosophical Theology

8 “May It Have Happened, Lord!”

Open Theism and Past-Directed Prayers

James N. Anderson

Imagine the situation. You wake up with a bolt, realizing in shock that you completely forgot to set your alarm the previous night and now you’ve overslept. You check the clock beside your bed: it’s 9:37 am. You’re going to be late for work, but that’s not the worst of it. One of your close friends had an appointment for a very important job interview at 8:30 am, and you had *promised* him that you would pray both before and during the interview. You promised to pray that he would get to the interview in good time, that he would be calm and collected, that he would be able to think and speak clearly, and that he would come across as a very competent candidate. Hastily you shoot up the following prayer: “Lord, please forgive me for failing to pray as I promised. But I pray now that the interview will have gone well for Alan.”

Does it make sense to pray such a prayer? Is it coherent to pray about things that are now in the past? Is it coherent to offer a prayer for which any divine answer would have to temporally precede the prayer itself? Whether or not they make sense, I suspect such past-directed prayers are not uncommon among believers. In some cases it matters a great deal to us whether such prayers are coherent, and, more to the point, whether they are *answerable*.¹ Such prayers may concern matters of life and death. Indeed, they may concern matters of *eternal* life and death.²

In this paper, I explore two related questions. First, are past-directed prayers (hereafter, PDPs) coherent and answerable in principle? Secondly, what are the implications of the answer to that first question for open theism, one of the tenets of which is that God lacks comprehensive foreknowledge of the future free decisions of His creatures? I will argue that PDPs are indeed coherent and answerable in principle, but only if God has comprehensive foreknowledge of future free decisions. If there are actual instances of answered PDPs, this invites a deductive argument against open theism, based on the following premise: *If open theism were true, there would be no instances of answered PDPs*. I then consider some possible open theist responses to this deductive argument, concluding that the deductive argument is too ambitious. However, a more modest *evidential* argument against open theism can be offered instead, which relies on defeasible rather than deductive reasoning. Such an argument still depends on there being actual

instances of answered PDPs—or at least *apparent* instances. I therefore conclude with a discussion of some plausible cases of apparent answers to PDPs.

What Counts as a Past-Directed Prayer?

Before proceeding we need a working definition of a past-directed prayer. Rather than re-invent the wheel, I propose here to adopt the definition offered by Kevin Timpe in his insightful paper, “Prayers for the Past.”³ Timpe notes that such prayers are *petitionary* or *impetratory* in that they entreat God to bring about—or rather to have brought about—some state of affairs (e.g., protection or guidance for a loved one). Timpe therefore refers to “past-directed impetratory prayers.” He defines a past-directed impetratory prayer (PIP) as follows:

PIP =_{df} A petitionary prayer that meets the following four criteria:

- (i) the prayer is offered by an agent A at time t_2 ;
- (ii) the prayer requests that God bring about some state of affairs S at time t_1 (where t_1 is prior to t_2);
- (iii) the prayed-for state of affairs S is brought about by God, at least in part, as a result of A’s prayer; that is, God’s knowledge of A’s prayer is one of the reasons He has for bringing S about; and
- (iv) God desires to bring about S only if A prays for S, such that if A does not pray for S, then God will not bring it about.⁴

I have two minor criticisms of Timpe’s definition. The first is that criterion (iv) appears to exclude *corporate* prayers. Suppose that a group of six people pray together for God to bring about some past state of affairs S. It may be that God’s willingness to bring about S doesn’t hang on the prayer of any *one* of those people, in which case criterion (iv) would not be met. (If one or two of them hadn’t prayed for S, God would still have brought about S; but if none of them had prayed for S, God would not have brought about S.) It seems wrong to say that this wouldn’t be a case of past-directed impetratory prayer. Ideally then, (iv) should be modified to allow for the possibility of corporate prayers.

The second criticism is that there seems to be a category of past-directed prayers—or of closely related prayers—that Timpe’s definition does not recognize. Consider the following scenario. A man is hiking in a remote part of the mountains; he falls down a slope, resulting in a severe cut to his arm. He realizes that he is bleeding profusely and will die if he is not found quickly and given medical attention, so he prays to God for help. Coincidentally—or so it appears—another hiker, who is a trained ER doctor, is walking in the same area and comes upon the injured man. He administers a tourniquet and saves the man’s life.

Here we have a case in which the prayer wasn’t *explicitly* directed toward the past, but the answer to the prayer—or at least *elements* of that

answer—needed to be in place prior to the prayer being offered. In the example given, the second hiker would need to have set out hours before the accident occurred. The answer to the prayer (assuming it was an answer to the prayer and not sheer coincidence) had to temporally precede the prayer, at least in part. I suspect that such "retroactively answered prayers" are far more common than we realize, but surely they raise the same sort of questions as explicitly past-directed prayers (i.e., prayers where the petitioner explicitly asks God to have brought about states of affairs in the past).⁵

In order to accommodate this category of prayers, where the past-directedness is implicit rather than explicit, we should modify criterion (ii) along these lines:

- (ii) the prayer requests either (a) that God bring about some state of affairs S at time t_1 (where t_1 is prior to t_2) or (b) that God bring about some state of affairs S^* at time t_2 where God's bringing about S^* at t_2 specifically requires that God bring about some state of affairs S at t_1 (where t_1 is prior to t_2).⁶

In what follows, then, "past-directed prayer" (PDP) refers to any petitionary prayer that meets Timpe's definition with the above modification to criterion (ii), thus allowing for both explicitly and implicitly past-directed prayers.

Could God Answer Past-Directed Prayers?

There's no question that PDPs *as such* are possible. The fact is that people can and do offer PDPs, regardless of whether those prayers are coherent. The interesting question is whether it makes sense to offer such prayers; in other words, whether it is possible for such prayers to be answered.

One significant consideration here is the petitioner's knowledge of the past. If Sam knows that his friend died of cancer at some date in the past, clearly it makes little sense for Sam to petition God to bring it about that his friend *didn't* die on that date. (Here I make the reasonable assumption that the past is fixed in such a way that past states of affairs cannot be altered by subsequent actions.) So one condition on a coherent PDP must be this: the person who asks God to have brought about S must not already know that S did *not* obtain.

But what about the case in which the petitioner already knows that S *did* obtain? There's nothing obviously contradictory about a PDP of that kind, although it does seem strange to think that someone would offer a PDP for something that they already know to have obtained. Such a prayer appears to be senseless because it appears to be *superfluous*. If S has already obtained, what difference does it make whether or not I ask God to bring about S ? What *need* is there for such a prayer?

We must be careful not to jump to conclusions here. From the mere fact that S is known to have obtained, one cannot deduce that future prayers for

S make no contribution to S's obtaining. To see this point, it will be helpful to consider a slightly different scenario: one in which a prayer is offered for a *future* event that is already known to occur. In fact, we need not rely on hypotheticals here, because we can find a historical example of the latter in the biblical book of Daniel. In chapter 9 we read:

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

(Daniel 9:1–2)

Daniel is referring here to the prophecy delivered by Jeremiah several decades earlier.⁷ Undoubtedly he believed this to be a genuine prophecy that would not fail to come to pass. Yet his response to the prophecy was not to wait passively for it to be fulfilled, but rather to offer a lengthy and impassioned prayer of confession for sin and petition for God to show mercy to his people by bringing an end to their desolations—an end that had already been promised by God.

Evidently Daniel did not reason as follows:

God has promised that S will come to pass; therefore S will come to pass; therefore it is pointless for me to pray for S to come to pass.

Rather, he reasoned along these lines:

God has promised that S will come to pass; but God has also made clear that S will occur only if his people offer heartfelt prayers of confession for sin and pleas for mercy; therefore I should offer such prayers so that S will come to pass, just as God has promised it will.

In other words, Daniel apparently took his knowledge of Israel's future deliverance as a positive motivation to pray for that deliverance rather than a reason *not* to pray for it, because he understood that the certainty of the outcome did not entail that it wouldn't be an answer to *his* prayers.

I see no reason why a parallel logic cannot be applied to PDPs. If it can make sense (at least in some cases) to pray for *future* states of affairs that one already knows God *will* bring about, it can also make sense (at least in some cases) to pray for *past* states of affairs that one already knows God *has* brought about, provided one believes that one's prayers contribute to God's bringing about those states of affairs. Already knowing that S has obtained in the past doesn't necessarily render incoherent a PDP that God have brought about S.

The other significant factor in considering whether PDPs make sense is whether God has the epistemic and metaphysical powers needed to answer

such prayers. In order to answer a PDP at t_2 requesting that God bring about some state of affairs S at t_1 it seems clear that God must (i) know that the prayer will be offered at t_2 and (ii) have the ability to bring about S at t_1 given his knowledge of the prayer at t_2 . Whether or not these conditions can be met depends in turn on the extent of God's knowledge (specifically his knowledge of our future free choices) and his relationship to time. Historically, theists have held a range of positions on these issues, so in order to consider whether God can answer PDPs, we must consider the question with respect to each of the positions—or at least the major ones. The following survey closely follows Timpe's discussion, but with some additions and modifications.⁸

Augustinianism

Timpe's exploration of PDPs assumes an *incompatibilist* (libertarian) view of human freedom. This is understandable, given that Timpe himself holds that view and it may well be the majority view among theist philosophers today. There is, however, a prominent compatibilist tradition within Christian theism which affirms a strong view of divine sovereignty and predestination while insisting upon its compatibility with human freedom and moral responsibility. So it will be worthwhile to include the major representative of this tradition in our survey. For want of a better label, and without wading into any historical or exegetical debates, I will call this view "Augustinianism."

According to Augustinianism, God predetermines or foreordains all events within the creation according to an eternal decree which does not depend in any respect on the free choices of his creatures. God's decree does not depend on either foreknowledge of what his creatures *will in fact* freely choose or so-called "middle knowledge," that is, prior knowledge of what any particular creature *would* freely choose in any specific circumstances. For the Augustinian, creatures freely choose as they do because God has decreed that they will so choose, but their choices are still *their* choices and they are free in whatever respects are necessary for moral responsibility and significant personal relationships. Augustinians thus have a very strong view of divine providence and are committed to a compatibilist view of human freedom.

On the face of it, Augustinianism can easily accommodate divine answers to PDPs. God knows in advance what people will pray because ultimately he has *ordained* those prayers. And since he ordains all events, it is clearly within his power (i) to bring about some state of affairs S at t_1 and (ii) to bring it about that one or more petitioners pray at t_2 that he bring about S at t_1 . If there is a serious question here, it concerns whether God's bringing about S at t_1 can really be understood as an *answer* to the prayer at t_2 given that God himself foreordained the prayer. Can the Augustinian sensibly claim that S was brought about by God, at least in part, *because* of the prayer?

If this is a genuine problem for Augustinianism, it's a problem for *all* petitionary prayers, not merely past-directed ones. However, the problem is resolved once we posit that God observes orderly means-end relationships in his eternal decree. If God ordains all things then he ordains *both* the ends *and* the means to those ends, and he can establish orderly means-end relationships between events in his creation. Suppose God ordains that the Hebrew slaves will escape from the Egyptian army, and that they will do so by means of passing through a divided Red Sea. Even granting that God ordained the entire series of events, it still makes sense to say that the Hebrews escaped *because of* the parted sea and that the escape of the Hebrews was a *result* of the parted sea. Likewise, if God ordains that Mary recovers from an illness and that Sam prays for Mary to recover, that is consistent with Mary's recovery being a *result* of Sam's prayer. There is no contradiction in saying that Mary recovered *because of* Sam's prayer.⁹ Note also that on the Augustinian view, all of the relevant counterfactuals turn out as expected. Just as the Augustinian can say, "If the Red Sea had not parted, the Hebrews would not have escaped," he can also say, "If Sam had not prayed, Mary would not have recovered." Thus if God can be said to answer *any* prayers on an Augustinian view, there's no reason to deny that he can answer *past-directed* prayers.

Molinism

Molinism is a theory designed to reconcile a strong view of divine providence, according to which God foreordains all things according to an eternal decree, with a strong view of human freedom: specifically, incompatibilist (libertarian) freedom. According to the Molinist, prior to his decree to create God possesses *middle knowledge*: knowledge of what any possible creaturely agent *would* freely choose in any specific set of circumstances. Thus for every creaturely agent S, and every fully specified set of circumstances C, God knows every subjunctive conditional of the form:

If S were in C, S would freely choose A.

On the basis of his middle knowledge God knows which possible worlds he *could* actualize by creating a particular set of free creatures and arranging for those free creatures to make their choices in specific sets of circumstances. Out of all the possible worlds he could actualize, God chooses (on the basis of various criteria) one particular world to actualize. Since God knows exactly what choices his creatures will make in that world, God possess comprehensive infallible foreknowledge of everything that will take place in the world.¹⁰

There has been endless debate over whether God *could* have the kind of middle knowledge on which Molinism depends. But for our purposes here we're assuming that Molinism is a coherent position. The question is whether Molinism can satisfactorily account for divine answers to PDPs.

Timpe, following Thomas Flint, argues that Molinism can do so. Suppose that God knows via his middle knowledge that if Sam were in C at t_2 then Sam would ask God to bring about some state of affairs S at t_1 , where t_1 is earlier than t_2 . There seems to be no reason why God could not actualize a world in which (i) he brings about S at t_1 and (ii) he arranges for Sam to be in C at t_2 . Moreover, his reasons for bringing about S at t_1 could include his knowledge that Sam in C at t_2 would pray for S at t_1 .¹¹

One complication here, which needs to be taken into account, is that C has to be a *fully specified* set of circumstances, and therefore C must include God's bringing about S at t_1 . But this need not present a problem provided that Sam would make the same decision to pray whether or not God brings about S at t_1 , i.e., provided that Sam's decision to pray is independent of the answer to his prayer. If Sam is ignorant of whether S obtained at t_1 and S's obtaining at t_1 has no significant effect on the immediate circumstances in which Sam makes his choice, it's reasonable to assume that Sam would choose the same way regardless of whether S obtains at t_1 .¹² So on the Molinist view there seems to be no reason why God could not answer PDPs.

Eternalism

Eternalism is the view that God transcends time and possesses a comprehensive immediate knowledge of what takes place in his creation at every time. God sees every event in the creation in "one eternal moment," so to speak. On the eternalist view, God doesn't *foreordain* all things, as he does on the Augustinian and Molinist views, nor does he have *foreknowledge* in the most literal sense of the term, since God doesn't stand in any temporal relation to events in the creation. But God knows everything that is future *for us*, because God eternally knows what takes place at every time. Furthermore, although God *himself* is not in time, he can bring about *effects* in time. God can cause temporal events within the creation.¹³

Concerns have been raised over whether a timeless God can truly *respond* to events in the creation, including the prayers of his creatures. Advocates of eternalism such as Eleonore Stump have addressed such concerns.¹⁴ Timpe argues that if God can answer prayers *at all* on the eternalist view, there's no reason to think he cannot answer *past-directed* prayers. If God can respond to a prayer offered at t_2 , that response could include bringing about some state of affairs S at t_1 , where t_1 is earlier than t_2 .

I believe Timpe is correct on this point, but there seems to be one oddity in the standard eternalist position that requires further thought. If God knows in "one eternal moment," what takes place at every time, then in that "one eternal moment" God knows *both* what will happen at t_1 and what will happen at t_2 , in which case he knows what he will bring about at t_1 in response to the prayer at t_2 . How then could the prayer at t_2 serve as part of the *explanation* for what God brings about at t_1 ? It seems there

needs to be an explanatory order from an event at t_2 to an event at t_1 as follows (where \rightarrow signifies “is part of the explanation for”):

[Sam prays at t_2] \rightarrow [God knows that Sam prays at t_2] \rightarrow [God brings about S at t_1]

God’s eternal knowledge is thus an intermediate point in the chain of explanation. But God’s knowledge that Sam prays at t_2 occurs in the *same eternal moment* as God’s knowledge that he brings about S at t_1 . So how could God’s bringing about S at t_1 be *explanatorily subsequent* to God’s knowledge that he brings about S at t_1 ?

In fact, this oddity applies equally to *non-past-directed* prayers, since the same problem would arise even if t_2 were temporarily prior to t_1 . The only way out for the eternalist, as far as I can see, is to posit that God’s eternal knowledge does *not* consist in a single eternal moment, but rather in a *plurality* of eternal moments, such that there can be relations of explanatory order between those moments. In other words, the eternalist must concede that God’s eternal knowledge is ‘partitioned’ in some fashion, in order that God’s knowledge of what takes place at some time t_1 can explain (in part) what he brings about at some other (earlier or later) time t_2 , which in turn explains his knowledge of what takes place at t_2 . (Here I assume that on the eternalist view what *actually* takes place in the creation must be explanatorily prior to God’s *knowledge* of what takes place in the creation, even in those instances where what actually takes place is partly an effect of divine actions.)

At any rate, we can say this much. The eternalist view holds that (i) God is atemporal, (ii) God has exhaustive knowledge of what takes place in time, and (iii) God can bring about events in time in response to other events in time. *If* this view is coherent—and for argument’s sake we’re assuming that each of the views considered is coherent on its own terms—then the eternalist view *can* account for divine answers to PDPs.

Simple Foreknowledge

The central difference between the eternalist view and the simple-foreknowledge view is that the latter takes God to be a *temporal* being. God is “within time” such that he experiences the passing of time and his actions take place in time (not merely the *effects* of his actions, as on the eternalist view). Even though God passes through time, God nevertheless has comprehensive infallible foreknowledge of future events on account of his essential omniscience. For any times t_1 and t_2 , where t_2 is later than t_1 , God knows at t_1 all that will happen at t_2 . (Exactly *how* God possesses such knowledge according to the simple-foreknowledge view need not concern us here.) God’s comprehensive foreknowledge is fully present at the very first moment of creation and indeed at every prior moment.¹⁵

Timpe argues that the simple-foreknowledge view can explain the efficacy of PDPs provided that free agents have “counterfactual power over certain of

God's beliefs."¹⁶ Suppose that Sam performs some action A at t_2 . According to the simple-foreknowledge view, God believes (infallibly) at t_1 that S will do A at t_2 . Sam has counterfactual power at t_2 over God's belief at t_1 if Sam's having refrained from doing A at t_2 would have made it that God believed otherwise at t_1 (i.e., God would have believed that Sam will refrain from A at t_2). If Sam has such counterfactual power, this can explain how God's actions at t_1 (such as bringing about state of affairs S) can be a *response* to Sam's actions at t_2 (such as Sam praying for God to bring about S at t_1). Hence the simple-foreknowledge view can account for divine answers to PDPs.

Once again, I suggest matters are not so straightforward, for this scenario presents a similar oddity as that faced by the eternalist view. If God has comprehensive foreknowledge at every time t , there must be some time t_0 prior to t_1 at which God knows not only that Sam will pray at t_2 but also that he (God) will bring about S at t_1 . Both events are included in God's foreknowledge at t_0 . Indeed, there has *never* been a time at which that wasn't the case. But as in the eternalist scenario, Sam's praying at t_2 has to be *explanatorily prior* to God's bringing about S at t_1 , and thus God's *foreknowledge* of what takes place at t_2 has to be explanatorily prior to his foreknowledge of what takes place at t_1 .

What this suggests is that God's foreknowledge cannot be *simple* in the sense that it lacks any internal explanatory order. The timeworn metaphor of God "looking down the corridors of time" and seeing all future events in one simple moment of foreknowledge cannot be correct if God is able to answer PDPs. Instead, like the eternalist, the simple foreknowledge advocate must posit some kind of 'partitioning' within God's foreknowledge. To use a crude metaphor: God must "cover one eye" when looking into the future. Specifically, in order for God to answer at t_1 a prayer at t_2 , he must in some sense withhold his foreknowledge of what takes place at t_1 (or at least some relevant subset of what takes place) until he has foreknowledge of what takes place at t_2 . Once God foreknows that Sam will pray at t_2 for God to bring about S at t_1 , and has decided to answer Sam's prayer, then God's foreknowledge of what takes place at t_1 can "fall into place," so to speak.¹⁷

While I harbor some doubts about whether this partitioning model is coherent, it doesn't strike me as clearly incoherent. At any rate, if it is possible on the simple-foreknowledge view for God to bring about some state of affairs S at t_1 on the basis of his foreknowledge of a prayer at t_2 for him to do so, then it seems that the simple-foreknowledge view can account for divine answers to PDPs.

Open Theism

Open theism, as I define it here, affirms the following three propositions: (1) God is temporal; (2) humans have libertarian free will; and (3) God does not foreknow the free choices of humans. On the open theist view, God possesses *some* foreknowledge, namely, foreknowledge of events that do not depend on (future) human free choices (e.g., a particular speck of cosmic

dust at the edge of the galaxy floating to a certain position three weeks from now). But the relevant point here is that God lacks foreknowledge of human free choices.¹⁸

It seems obvious that the open theist will struggle to explain how God could answer past-directed prayers. In order for God to bring about S at t_1 in response to Sam's prayer at t_2 (where t_2 is later than t_1) God needs to know at t_1 that Sam will pray that specific prayer at t_2 . But on the open theist view, God doesn't know at t_1 that Sam will pray that prayer at t_2 —at least if Sam's prayer is offered *freely*.

The open theist might be tempted to reply, "It's true that God cannot *know* that Sam will pray at t_2 . But God can *reasonably believe* that Sam will pray at t_2 (or around that time) based on his knowledge of the *probability* that Sam will pray at t_2 . So perhaps God brings about S at t_1 because he reasonably believes that Sam will pray at t_2 ."¹⁹ The flaw in this response is that God's bringing about S at t_1 wouldn't be a response to the *future fact* of Sam's prayer but merely a response to the *present probability* of Sam's prayer, which is a very different thing. There is no causal or even counterfactual connection between God's action and Sam's prayer. The basis for God's action is not Sam's *actual praying* but rather a set of probabilities that hold *regardless of whether Sam actually prays*. As such, God's bringing about S at t_1 can't be plausibly interpreted as an *answer* to Sam's prayer at t_2 .²⁰ It would be a pseudo-answer at best. I therefore concur with Timpe's conclusion that open theism "cannot account for the efficacy of past-directed impetratory prayers."²¹

A Deductive Argument Against Open Theism

Of the five major views on divine providence, divine foreknowledge, and God's relation to time, it appears that only open theism lacks the resources to give a plausible account of how God could answer PDPs. Thus it appears that if open theism were true, there would be no divinely answered PDPs. (Of course, PDPs could still be *offered* if open theism were true; the point is that no PDPs could be answered by God.) If none of the major views could account for answers to PDPs, there would be no special problem for open theism. But since the other views *can* offer plausible accounts, it follows that if we have reason to believe that PDPs *could* be answered—perhaps because we have reason to believe that PDPs *have* been answered—that presents a unique challenge to open theism.²²

Let us now assume, purely for the sake of argument, that we have good evidence that there have been instances of divinely answered past-directed prayers. (We will consider later on whether in fact there is any good evidence of such prayers.) It would be tempting to mount the following deductive argument:

- (1) If open theism were true, there would be no instances of answered PDPs.
- (2) There are instances of answered PDPs.
- (3) Therefore, open theism is not true.

The argument is deductively valid, so the open theist must challenge at least one of the premises. Here is one way in which (2) could be challenged. The open theist could argue that our evidence *appears* to support (2), but that evidence is also logically consistent with the falsity of (2). As I noted earlier, on the open theist view God could bring about states of affairs based on fallible predictions of how people will pray in the future, although those wouldn't properly count as *answers* to prayers. Nevertheless, the open theist might argue, such scenarios would be *empirically indistinguishable* from answers to prayers. For all intents and purposes it would *look to us* as though God had foreseen those prayers and answered them in advance. So any evidence offered in support of (2) would be ambiguous in that regard.

It's true that any empirical evidence for answered PDPs would also be consistent with the open theist's alternative explanation. Even so, that alternative explanation is less than fully satisfying. Surely the most *natural* response to such events would be to conclude that God had in fact foreseen and answered the prayers. The open theist's explanation seems *ad hoc* and therefore less plausible in principle. It also raises the following worry: if God *were* to act as the open theist here suggests, he would be guilty of misleading people (or of allowing them to be misled) into believing that he has foreknowledge of their free choices. Presumably the God of open theism would not want people to be so misled. If open theism were true, we would expect God not to act in such a way as to give people the impression that open theism is *not* true.

Another challenge to (2) would be to argue that what appear to be answers to PDPs are merely fortuitous coincidences. According to this response, if Sam prays at t_2 for God to bring about state of affairs S at t_1 , and it turns out that S obtained at t_1 , the explanation for S's obtaining is *not* that God brought about S because he fallibly predicted that Sam would pray at t_2 . Instead, either God brought about S for some *other* reason (having nothing to do with Sam praying at t_2) or S came about via natural rather than supernatural means. But either would *look to us* like a divine answer to Sam's prayer at t_2 .

This challenge to (2) has some mileage in principle, but the devil is in the details. Its plausibility will depend on the actual evidence offered in support of (2). If the PDPs are very specific in their content, and the states of affairs requested are highly unlikely to have obtained in the natural course of events, it won't be plausible to chalk things up to coincidence. However, since we are postponing for now consideration of the actual evidence for answered PDPs, let us simply note that this response offers another escape route from the deductive argument by challenging the grounds for (2).

What scope does the open theist have for challenging (1)? As we concluded from the survey in the previous section, there is good reason to accept (1) because God's ability to answer PDPs depends crucially on his having foreknowledge of future free choices. However, the open theist may have a way out here too. Although the open theist is committed to humans possessing

libertarian free will, she could appeal to the concept of “will-setting” in order to argue that God can foreknow *some* future free choices.²³ The idea here is that an agent *S* can make free choices prior to t_1 that ‘set’ his will in such a way that *S*’s choice at t_1 is actually fixed (i.e., *S* could not have chosen otherwise at t_1). Such a choice can still be regarded as free in an important sense, and *S* can be held morally responsible for it, because that choice can be traced to prior *undetermined* free choices. The choice is said to be *derivatively* free. Any derivatively free choice must be dependent on one or more prior *non-derivatively* free choices.

The open theist could therefore argue that God can infallibly foreknow *derivatively* free choices, and thus God could answer *some* PDPs, namely, those offered by derivatively free choice. Consider a situation in which Sam prior to t_1 makes some will-setting free choices, such that his will becomes ‘set’ with respect to how he prays. It is possible that at t_1 God foreknows that Sam will pray in a particular way at some later time t_2 . (Note that t_2 need not be an exact time: the open theist doesn’t need God to know *exactly* when Sam will pray, only that he *will* pray at some future time.) God could then bring about some state of affairs *S* at t_1 in answer to Sam’s as-yet-future prayer.

If the concepts of will-setting and derivatively free choices are coherent (and I will not dispute them here) then this proposal offers a way for the open theist to defuse the deductive argument. The first premise of the argument makes a strong claim, and the scenario sketched above shows that we have good reason to reject it. An open theist who allows for PDPs arising from prior will-setting choices can account for answers to those prayers. As such, I conclude that the deductive argument against open theism fails.²⁴

An Evidential Argument Against Open Theism

The problem with the deductive argument is that it is too ambitious. But in light of the difficulties faced by open theism in accounting for answers to PDPs, a less ambitious *evidential* argument can be developed. The argument could be formulated in a number of ways (e.g., as a Bayesian argument) but here I offer an argument via inference to the best explanation.²⁵

As we’ve seen, the open theist could offer several distinct explanations for what *appear* to be divine answers to PDPs. One explanation is that God foreknew the prayers because the choices of those who prayed were only derivatively free; they were fixed by prior non-derivatively free choices. Another explanation is that God brought about the states of affairs requested in the prayers based on fallible (but reliable) predictions. A further explanation is that the states of affairs requested in the prayers obtained by sheer coincidence.

The trouble with these explanations, however, is that they aren’t *good* explanations. If we find that there are *many* instances of apparent answers

to PDPs, it becomes far less plausible to claim that they're mere coincidences, or that God is in the habit of acting on the basis of fallible predictions of PDPs (despite its tendency to mislead people about his abilities), or that the PDPs were offered on the basis of choices fixed by prior will-setting decisions. In addition, the more *specific* the PDPs, the less plausible all of these explanations become. This is most obviously true for the coincidence explanation, but it is also true for the other two. A very specific prayer would be far more difficult to predict accurately on the basis of merely probabilistic knowledge about a person's character, inclinations, past experiences, and so forth. And while the idea of a *generally* settled will is plausible (i.e., a will-setting which determines that a person will always make certain *kinds* of choices in the future), it stretches credibility to think that a person could make will-setting choices that would inevitably result in a very specific prayer being offered at some point in the future, unless the prayer comes right on the heels of those will-setting choices.

Contrast these with the far simpler and less *ad hoc* explanation that these apparent answers to PDPs *really are* answers to PDPs, and that God is able to answer such prayers because he possesses comprehensive infallible foreknowledge of the future free choices of his creatures. Armed with this observation, we can formulate the following evidential argument:

- (1) There *appear* to be answers to PDPs.²⁶
- (2) The best explanation for (1) is that God has foreknowledge of future free choices and he sometimes answers PDPs on the basis of his foreknowledge.²⁷
- (3) Therefore, God has foreknowledge of future free choices and he sometimes answers PDPs on the basis of his foreknowledge.
- (4) Therefore, open theism is false.

The inferring of (3) from (1) and (2) is a case of *defeasible* reasoning. Clearly (3) isn't *entailed* by (1) and (2). But if both (1) and (2) are true, we have good reason to think that (3) is also true. And (4) is entailed by (3).

Our earlier survey of the different positions on God's foreknowledge and relationship to time, and the extent to which they can account for answers to PDPs, lends considerable support to (2). But what about (1)? Is there any evidence of answers to PDPs?

Has God Answered Past-Directed Prayers?

Our conclusion to this point is a conditional one: *if* there appear to be answers to PDPs, that is evidence against open theism. This in itself is a significant conclusion. Most arguments against open theism are philosophical or theological in nature. But here we have the prospect of an *empirical evidential* argument against open theism. If open theism were true, we would not expect to observe certain things; so if we do observe them, we have empirical evidence against open theism.

Before we consider some apparent cases of answered PDPs, we should reflect briefly on the appropriate criteria for *identifying* answered PDPs. Suppose I pray today and ask God to have brought it about that it rained in Edinburgh yesterday. (Assume that at the time I pray, I don't know whether it rained in Edinburgh yesterday.) After praying, I check the weather report and discover that it *did* rain in Edinburgh yesterday. If answers to PDPs are possible in principle, it's at least possible that God brought about rain in Edinburgh yesterday partly in answer to my prayer today. But our grounds for drawing that conclusion are shaky to say the least, simply because it regularly rains in Edinburgh anyway. Most of us would reasonably conclude that this was sheer coincidence.

What criteria would need to be fulfilled in order for us to reasonably conclude that a PDP had been answered? I suggest the following conditions would need to be met:

- (1) Some petitioner P prayed at t_2 either (a) for God to bring about some state of affairs S at t_1 , where t_1 is earlier than t_2 , or (b) for God to bring about some state of affairs S*, such that God's bringing about S* would require God to bring about some prior state of affairs S at t_1 , where t_1 is earlier than t_2 .
- (2) S obtained at t_1 .
- (3) P did not know at t_2 that S obtained at t_1 .
- (4) It's unlikely that S would have obtained at t_1 in the normal course of events.
- (5) God's bringing about S at t_1 in answer to P's prayer is consistent with what we know about God's character and purposes.

The first condition simply corresponds to the definition of a PDP (allowing for both explicitly and implicitly past-directed prayers). After all, we can reasonably conclude that a PDP has been *answered* only if a PDP has been *offered*. The third condition is necessary to excludes cases in which P prays for God to have brought about S while knowing already that S has obtained; in such cases it would be more reasonable to conclude that P's prayer has been conditioned by that prior knowledge. In other words, it would be more likely that the prayer was fitted (by P) to the prior state of affairs than that the prior state of affairs was fitted (by God) to the prayer.

I assume the rationales for the other conditions are obvious enough. Note that the second condition does *not* require a supernatural intervention by God or a violation of the laws of nature. For example, P might have prayed for his friend to have won the lottery yesterday. All else being equal, it's unlikely that his friend would have won the lottery.²⁸ But there's nothing *necessarily* supernatural or miraculous about his friend winning the lottery.²⁹

With these criteria before us, let us now consider some cases of apparent answers to PDPs. One fairly well-known case comes from the testimony of Helen Roseveare, who served as a medical missionary in Central Africa.

While Roseveare was working in a labor ward, a woman died after giving birth prematurely, leaving behind a tiny baby and her two-year-old sister. The hospital had no incubator and no special feeding facilities. Although they were located on the equator, the hospital rooms were prone to chilly drafts at night, which threatened the life of the baby, and their last remaining water bottle burst while it was being filled. The following day, Roseveare related the desperate situation to some of the orphanage children. One of the children, a ten-year-old girl by the name of Ruth, offered a very specific and remarkably audacious prayer:

"Please God," she prayed, "send us a hot water bottle. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, as the baby'll be dead; so please send it this afternoon. . . . And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl, so she'll know You really love her?"³⁰

Roseveare confesses that at the time she found it hard to "Amen" the prayer:

The only way God *could* answer this particular prayer would be by sending me a parcel from the homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, never received a parcel from home; anyway, if anyone *did* send me a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator!³¹

Nevertheless, according to her own testimony, she received a parcel at her house that very afternoon containing various items including "a brand-new, rubber, hot water bottle" and "a small, beautifully dressed dolly." The parcel had been mailed five months earlier. Roseveare herself had no doubt that this was a divine answer to Ruth's prayer.³²

A second case comes from Edith Schaeffer's book *L'Abri*. Schaeffer recounts the occasion when she and her husband were threatened with eviction from Switzerland and an abrupt end to their ministry in that country unless they could find a home of their own to live in. Having no money to buy a home, they looked for places to rent, but even those proved too expensive for them. When the last day for them to find a home arrived, Schaeffer was told about one in a nearby town that would be perfect for their ministry needs. Unfortunately, she discovered it was only for sale, not for rent. She then relates how she turned in desperation to God in prayer:

As I asked for God's guidance concerning the chalet which had seemed such an exciting answer to prayer that afternoon and now seemed so impossible, my own logical sequence of thought brought me to begin a sentence in which I expected to ask that the owner change his mind and let it. It was after a length of time during which I had been inwardly struggling for reality in my sincerity of wanting God's will, when I came to this specific request concerning the chalet. It was then that suddenly

I became flooded with a surge of assurance that God can do anything, nothing is impossible with Him. My sentence changed in the middle, and I ended my prayer with a definite plea, which even startled me as I said it, “Oh, please show us Thy will about this house tomorrow, and if we are to *buy* it, send us a sign that will be clear enough to convince Fran as well as me, send us one thousand dollars before ten o’clock tomorrow morning.”³³

Early the following morning the Schaeffers received three letters in the mail. One was from a couple in the United States who had followed their ministry with interest. Three months earlier, the husband had unexpectedly received a sum of money from his employer. The couple had debated what to do with it, eventually deciding they should “give it to the Lord’s work.” Specifically, they decided to send it to the Schaeffers to “buy a house somewhere that will always be open to young people.”³⁴ The amount was exactly one thousand dollars. Note that the answer to the prayer—or at least key elements of it—occurred weeks, even months, before the prayer itself was offered (and before the circumstances which gave rise to the prayer). The prayer was specific, and the apparent answer was precise in its timing and its content.

A third case comes from my own circle of acquaintances. A former student reported an occasion when she was working for a mission agency and was informed that her support account was in deficit, with the implication that she would not be paid. She sat down and determined precisely what would be needed to bring the account back to balance and prayed for the Lord to provide it. Two days later, she received a check for that exact amount. The significant factor here is that the church group who had sent her the money had decided to do so days before she knew that she would need it.

I suspect there are many more stories like this to be told. Indeed, I would wager that a significant proportion of ‘regular’ answers to prayer will, on closer examination, turn out to be cases of implicitly past-directed prayers, since the answers to those prayers needed to be “set in motion” well before the prayers were offered.³⁵

Conclusion

I have argued that open theism faces considerable difficulties in accounting for answers to PDPs. While open theists do have some options available for explaining (or perhaps explaining away) apparent answers to PDPs, these explanations are generally implausible and *ad hoc*. If open theism were true, we would not *expect* to see apparent answers to PDPs, and therefore any apparent answers to PDPs serve as evidence against open theism. In at least one respect, then, open theism is susceptible to empirical disconfirmation. Furthermore, there appear to be actual cases of answered PDPs. While I have related only a few examples in this paper, I suspect that a more thorough and rigorous investigation would uncover many more examples.

Even if there are apparent cases of answered PDPs and these constitute evidence against open theism, it doesn't follow that this evidence gives open theists a defeater for their beliefs about divine providence and foreknowledge. Nevertheless, such evidence could contribute to a cumulative case argument against open theism which draws on a combination of theological, philosophical, and empirical considerations. If nothing else, apparent answers to past-directed prayers should give open theists pause for thought.

Notes

1. Or more precisely: answerable *in the affirmative*.
2. An acquaintance of mine told me that following his father's death he prayed that his unbelieving father "might have trusted Christ as his Savior before he died."
3. Kevin Timpe, "Prayers for the Past," *Religious Studies* 41 (2005): 305–322.
4. *Ibid.*, 307.
5. So as to avoid begging the question regarding whether such prayers have ever been actually answered, I should really say "prayers that *would* require a (partially) retroactive answer" rather than "retroactively answered prayers."
6. I say "specifically requires" so as to exclude very general preconditions for divine answers to prayer, such as *God having created a universe* or *God having created human beings*. Without this qualification, any prayer whatsoever would count as an implicitly past-directed prayer.
7. See Jeremiah 25:8–14.
8. In each case the position under consideration will be assumed to be coherent on its own terms. The question at hand is not whether the position *itself* is coherent, but whether it can account for divine answers to PDPs on the assumption that it is coherent.
9. To be clear, "because of" carries here a broad explanatory sense rather than a narrow causal sense. The claim is not that Sam's prayer *caused* Mary's recovery (or caused God to bring about Mary's recovery) but that Sam's prayer constitutes part of the explanation for Mary's recovery.
10. Molinists have held different views on whether God himself is temporal, at least subsequent to creation. Those who hold that God transcends time will deny that God has *literal* foreknowledge (i.e., knowledge of the future). But all Molinists will agree that for every time *t*, God knows infallibly what takes place at *t*.
11. Objection: "On the Molinist account, God's reason for bringing about *S* at *t*₁ is not that Sam *will* pray in *C* at *t*₂, but rather that Sam *would* pray in *C* at *t*₂. So God is really acting in response to a counterfactual truth rather than a factual truth about Sam's prayer; that's to say, God isn't acting in answer to Sam's *actual* prayer." Strictly speaking, this is correct. But as in the Augustinian account, there's still a meaningful sense in which, according to God's ordering of means and ends, *S* is a *result* of Sam's prayer, and if Sam had not prayed, *S* would not have obtained.
12. If, on the other hand, Sam knows that *S* obtained at *t*₁, it's very likely that fact *will* influence his decision. But as I argued earlier, it doesn't follow that he'll decide *not* to pray. So it's still possible that the counterfactuals turn out in such a way that God can actualize a world in which Sam offers a PDP at *t*₂ and God answers it at *t*₁.
13. The version of eternalism considered here also affirms a libertarian view of human freedom.
14. Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas, Arguments of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 2003), 149–158.

15. If God is essentially temporal and has no beginning or end, it follows that there must be an infinite number of past moments as well as an infinite number of future moments.
16. Timpe, "Prayers for the Past," 311.
17. The words 'until', 'once', and 'then' speak of logical or explanatory priority rather than temporal priority. I do not argue that on the simple-foreknowledge view God's foreknowledge cannot be complete at any one *temporal* moment.
18. Timpe identifies open theism with the view that there are no true propositions about future free choices (such propositions either being false or lacking any truth-value). Timpe, "Prayers for the Past," 316. However, some self-identified open theists, such as William Hasker and Richard Swinburne, take the view that there are such true propositions (but God cannot know them). William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 123–125; Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, Revised ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 167–183.
19. It's important to note that on this view God must reasonably believe not only *that* Sam will pray at t_2 but also *what* Sam will pray; in other words, God needs to reliably predict the *content* of the prayer as well. We will return to this point later.
20. Timpe argues that (on the open theist view) God's actions at t_1 could not be a response to a prayer at t_2 "because prior to t_2 there was no fact of the matter" about what the person who prayed would do at t_2 . But as I noted earlier (footnote 18) some open theists believe there *is* a fact of the matter about future free choices.
21. Timpe, "Prayers for the Past," 317.
22. As noted earlier (footnote 8) I have assumed throughout that the other positions are coherent. An open theist might object that the alternatives to open theism can offer plausible accounts of PDPs *only if they are coherent*, but none of them is coherent (so claims the open theist). However, it would be a tall order indeed to show that *none* of the alternatives to open theism is coherent; that would amount to showing that open theism necessarily follows from theism *simpliciter*.
23. Robert Kane, "Free Will, Responsibility and Will-Setting," *Philosophical Topics* 24, no. 2 (1996): 67–90; Robert Kane, "Some Neglected Pathways in the Free Will Labyrinth," in *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 406–437.
24. There is another way in which, given open theism, God could *appear* to answer PDPs, namely, by 'fixing' prayers so that they correspond to prior events brought about by God. For example, God could bring about some state of affairs S at t_1 and then somehow ensure that Sam prays at t_2 for God to have brought about S at t_1 (e.g., by impressing certain thoughts on Sam or by directly influencing his will). I assume open theists will not find this an attractive explanation, since on open theist assumptions it would involve both divine deception and divine coercion.
25. Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation*, 2nd ed., International Library of Philosophy (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).
26. The first premise must be stated in terms of appearances so as not to beg the question against the open theist.
27. Obviously the argument takes the existence of God for granted—a justifiable assumption given the dialectical context in which the argument is offered.
28. Of course, it's not unlikely for *someone* to win the lottery, but the probability of any *specific* player winning is very low. The specificity of the prayer is a key factor here.
29. Whether the friend's winning the lottery is consistent with what we know about God's character and purposes is another matter.
30. Helen M. Roseveare, *Living Faith* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2007), 57.

31. Ibid.
32. Clearly the credibility of this story hangs on the credibility of Roseveare as a witness, but I see no reason to question her credibility as a witness or the historicity of this account.
33. Edith Schaeffer, *L'Abri* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1969), 96–97.
34. Ibid., 98.
35. It's also worth observing that in many cases—perhaps even the majority of cases—the answers to such prayers involve the free choices of human agents other than the ones offering the prayers. Certainly that is so for the three cases cited here. Assuming that God must somehow coordinate those free choices in order to answer the prayer, these cases present an additional challenge for open theism, given its weak account of divine providence.

9 Open Theism, Risk-Taking, and the Problem of Evil

Greg Welty

Open Theism vs. Theological Determinism

Open theism is the view that God lacks foreknowledge of undetermined future events, such as knowledge of how humans will or would use their libertarian freedom. This has the corollary that God's providence is risky rather than risk-free. William Hasker, one of the most prominent and philosophically sophisticated proponents of open theism, defines what it would mean for God to take risks: "*God takes risks if he makes decisions that depend for their outcomes on the responses of free creatures in which the decisions themselves are not informed by knowledge of the outcomes.*"¹ God's risk-taking just is God's providential decision-making in the absence of such knowledge. By way of contrast, if God determines all of human history, including all human responses, then his decisions cannot *depend* on those responses, and so 'theologically determinist' divine providence is risk-free. Similarly, if God providentially plans the universe in light of his logically prior 'middle knowledge' of how humans would use their freedom, then his providence is also risk-free, for his providential decisions are informed by his knowledge of how humans would use their freedom. But if God timelessly knows actual human responses, or has complete 'simple foreknowledge' of them, this knowledge comes 'too late' for his providential decisions to be informed by it. So he wouldn't utilize such foreknowledge in providential decision-making.²

It follows that theological determinism and Molinism require risk-free providence, open theism and 'incremental' simple foreknowledge require risky providence, and divine timelessness and 'complete' simple foreknowledge are (by themselves) not systems of providence at all. If middle knowledge faces insuperable, independent objections—perhaps because there can be no true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom—then the choices among theological systems of providence are essentially two: the risk-free providence of theological determinism, or the risky providence of open theism.³

Open theism is said to be preferable to alternative theological conceptions of providence when it comes to handling the problem of evil. Put positively, "Open theism has distinctive implications concerning the nature of God and God's relationships with the world and with humankind that distinguish it

from other versions of theism in ways that are important for our topic.”⁴ Put negatively, “Theological determinism is emphatically rejected, not least because of the difficulty—the insuperable difficulty, as I believe—it creates for any attempt to deal constructively with the problem of evil.”⁵ “It seems, however, that the difficulties for the no-risk view are especially severe.”⁶

This chapter considers four areas where the risky providence of open theism is supposed to make a difference in solving the problem of evil: gratuitous evil, meticulous providence, the moral motivation of human beings, and the morality of risk-taking. In my view the typical open theist accountings of these differences are flawed. In no case do the standard open theist positions in these areas give open theism an edge on the problem of evil, and with respect to at least some of them, the problem is worse than on theological determinism (or on Molinism or other free will theisms, for that matter).

The Potential Relevance of Gratuitous Evil

Open theists believe that their system of providence is advantageous because it can *accept the existence of gratuitous evil* in God’s universe, that is, moral or natural evil that did not need to occur in order to bring about a greater good or block a worse evil. By way of contrast, if God has the kind of meticulous control over the universe that is claimed on theological determinism, then *no evil would be gratuitous*. Rather, it would occur because it was necessary for a greater good. (If it wasn’t thus necessary as a means to this good, if the greater good could have been obtained apart from the actual occurrence of the evil, then due to his goodness God would have precluded the evil from his plan for history, and given his power of determination he could have precluded it.)

Open theists believe that gratuitous evil is made possible by the fact that God created the world in the absence of knowledge of how humans would respond to him, to their environment, and to one another. God has not only created a natural order of laws of nature, but also placed within that natural order human beings who have libertarian free will. In doing so he did not ensure the actualization of a ‘possible world’ in all of its meticulous detail, but only actualized a ‘world type’ in which many of the future details are up to humans and not up to him. God created this world type—including both the natural order and the existence of free human beings—in order to realize tremendously great goods for that creation: the exercise of freedom as intrinsically good, the stability of laws of nature as a prerequisite to the intelligible exercise of that freedom, and the opportunity for a whole host of good things that this freedom makes possible, such as morally good choices, uncoerced human/human and human/divine relationships, and the development of human potential, human culture, and human community in which humans take responsibility for one another. But God’s risk-taking in the creation project, his creation of the world type in the absence of knowledge of how humans would respond, means that there is no guarantee at the outset

that human beings will always avail themselves of these opportunities. They may use their freedom to make bad choices (moral evil), and the very laws of nature that make possible these tremendously good opportunities may also on a great many occasions ensure significant pain and suffering not intended by God (natural evil). Such risk is the price God pays to get the opportunities for the great goods previously listed. No moral or natural evil *must* occur in order for any of these great goods to be realized, and so any such evils are gratuitous in that sense, and indeed *must* be gratuitous. But the necessary conditions for obtaining these great goods include the real opportunity for the evils to occur. If the risk is worth it—and open theists argue that these natural-order and free-will theodicies show this is the case—then open theists have a solution to the problem of evil.⁷

While it may be tempting to think that God in his perfect goodness would simply swoop in with his omnipotent power and rescue humans from impending moral or natural evil, thus eliminating any and all cases of evil, open theists insist that God's constantly doing so would undermine God's good goals for the creation:

God does have it in his power to prevent any specific instance of evil. For open theism, however, such prevention would have to take the form of direct divine intervention in the situation leading to the evil, either by a physical miracle or by stripping the human agent of the power to choose evil on that occasion. It is evident, furthermore, that in order to materially affect the overall balance of good and evil in the world such interventions would have to be carried out on a truly massive scale and would seriously undermine the regular operation of nature and the capacity of human beings to act and take responsibility for their own actions.⁸

We might ask why it is an *advantage* for open theism, in contrast to other systems of providence, that its solution to the problem of evil can accept the existence of gratuitous evil. After all, the natural-order and free-will theodicies are not the exclusive property of open theists. They have been employed by theists for millennia, not just by contemporary open theists. The answer seems to be threefold: preserving a place for gratuitous evil sidesteps a key premise of the evidential argument from evil, keeps us from attributing to God a meticulous providence in which God intends that evils come to pass, and avoids undermining human moral motivation.

Which View of Providence Must Accept the Evidential Argument's Normative Premise?

Rejecting the Normative Premise

The evidential argument from evil consists of a factual premise (there is gratuitous evil) and a normative premise (God would prevent gratuitous

evil), concluding from these that we have evidence to believe that God does not exist. 'Skeptical theism' undercuts this atheist argument by offering doubts about the factual premise: the fact that some evil *seems* pointless—that is, appears not needed to bring about a greater good or block a worse evil—should not be taken as evidence that it *is* pointless, for given our very substantial cognitive limitations we are not able to discern the difference between a case of evil that is pointless within a world-sized providential scheme and a case of evil that is not. It is not given us to know these kinds of facts, and so not given us to know the factual premise (or even its likelihood).

The skeptical theist move has appealed to many. But we have seen that if open theist providence licenses the natural-order and free-will theodicies, then there is little reason to think that God *would* prevent gratuitous evil, for such evil is the price God pays for getting the opportunities and goods available within a natural order that contains free will. If so, then open theists appear to have an advantage with respect to any problem of evil that is articulated by way of the evidential argument: they can contest the normative premise as well as the factual premise. Unfortunately, it is claimed, theological determinism has no such luxury. Risk-free providence is typically committed to a greater-good theodicy that rejects gratuitous evils, whereas risky providence clearly accepts gratuitous evils.

A Second Look

Or does it? Although open theists reject the view that any particular evil is *necessary* in God's providential scheme (as a greater-good enabler or as a worse-evil blocker), it seems they must accept a parallel view: with respect to any particular actual evil, God's following his general policy of nonintervention *in this case* was necessary to maximize opportunities for great goods that could only be obtained by God's following such a non-interventionist policy. That is, given the policy and the essential role it plays in maximizing opportunities for great goods, God's hands are tied. He must permit the evil, or risk undermining the great goods the policy aims at. Given the policy, which is itself grounded in God's goodness and is therefore necessarily the best policy God could take toward creation, God *had* to permit the evil. (Why *else* wouldn't he intervene when he is fully able to do so, except for a judgment of this sort on God's part?)

It follows that for any evil in God's universe, God had to permit it upon pain of violating a policy grounded in his moral goodness. In this sense, *no* evil is gratuitous. Pick any evil you please. There is an answer as to why God permitted it, and that answer is not ultimately grounded in laws of nature or in human free will, but in God's decision to pursue goals for creation according to values grounded in his goodness. How is this different, in principle, from the greater-good theodicy?

A Concrete Example

Perhaps a concrete example will make this clear. It would have been trivial for divine omnipotence to prevent Sue's suffering. (The story of Sue, in Bruce Russell's telling, is of a five-year-old girl who is beaten, raped, and strangled by her mother's boyfriend.) Indeed, as Michael Scriven points out, far less than the omni-attributes are needed to motivate this problem of evil: we can "be certain that it could have been prevented if there had been someone there who had some modest physical power, an understanding of the situation, and some interest in preventing evil or pain."⁹ So why didn't God intervene? Well, here are the options:

- (1) God didn't intervene, *because he had ordained Sue's suffering for a greater good*, a good not obtainable in any other way. This is the theological determinist view that open theists find unacceptable.
- (2) God didn't intervene, *because he lacked knowledge, power, or goodness to do so*. This is the process theist or sub-theist view that neither the theological determinist nor open theist take seriously.
- (3) God didn't intervene, *because intervening would have undermined a general policy of allowing such an exercise of free will*, a policy which is aimed at securing the most instances of a wide variety of goods (the exercise of freedom as intrinsically good, the opportunity for moral goodness as intrinsically good, uncoerced relationships, soul-building, pain as God's megaphone, stability of laws of nature as a prerequisite to intelligible exercise of freedom, etc.)
- (4) God didn't intervene, *even though he could have done so without undermining a general policy of allowing such an exercise of free will*, a policy which is aimed at securing the most instances of a wide variety of goods.

Here, options (3) and (4) are the interesting ones. Presumably the open theist will reject (4), because on that option permitting the gratuitous evil remains wholly unjustified—even on open theist theodicy standards—as God's general policies of nonintervention *didn't* demand it. But if that policy didn't require nonintervention, then why didn't God intervene?

This leaves option (3) as at the heart of the open theist's theodicy. God did not plan or intend the evil. But the demands of morality *required* him to permit the evil; no other morally permissible route was open to him. He *had* to allow the evil in his universe, since permitting it was the only divine choice that didn't undermine a stance toward creation (multiply) grounded in God's moral goodness. But how is this so different from the classical theist greater-good theodicy, according to which no evil is gratuitous because it was necessary in order to obtain outweighing goods? In each case, God believes the universe is, *of necessity, better off* with him ordaining/permitting the evil, than with him eliminating the evil. *On either view, whether theological determinist or open theist, this is the justification*

that pertains to Sue: she had to suffer because her suffering makes the universe better in some way than it would otherwise be, and that is an outweighing good. On the theological determinist view, the universe would be worse off because one or more greater goods would not have been realized without the suffering. On the open theist view, the universe would be worse off because the great good of God's following a policy toward creation aimed at securing various goods would have been undermined, and it is worse to undermine that policy than to eliminate the evil by divine intervention. It follows that open theist theodicy eliminates, rather than accommodates, the category of gratuitous evil.¹⁰

Objections

Open theists might insist that the above portrayal is itself gratuitous, an unnecessary addition to their view of providence. They might say, "God *doesn't* make this choice in individual cases. Rather, he adopts at the outset a general policy toward creation, and doesn't look back. All God does providentially is choose that a *type* of world come into being, one with laws of nature and human free will. He has no need to make such decisions on an individual basis!"

But this is surely false, as God *has* intervened in a great many cases in Scriptural history, in order to eliminate many individual evils. Open theists must agree unless they are willing to be deists; but that is a move that open theism *per se* doesn't require. In response to the wickedness of humanity, God sent a highly destructive flood that eliminated innumerable humans from the earth, precluding them from making free-will choices at all (Genesis 6–7). In response to the moral evil of Egyptian slavery, God miraculously intervened and ended that institution of oppression against his people, going so far as to curse crops, livestock, and water supply, kill the firstborn among the Egyptians, and drown their army (Exodus 7–14). God miraculously struck down a Herod who blasphemously received worship from others, so that he breathed his last in the very midst of his sin (Acts 12:20–23). In these and many other cases, God overrode both human free will and the stability of the laws of nature in order to eliminate these particular evils. That is, he judged that his general policies of upholding natural order and free will would not be undermined by divine intervention in these cases. These are all decisions God made, and it would be extremely odd to think that divine interventions such as these require decisions on God's part, but divine permission does not.

Indeed, in the very nature of the case, *all* permissions are decisions, since to be *permissions* they must be attended with awareness of and power over the situation. If I am aware of a fight among my children going on in the next room, and I stay where I am, I have made a decision.¹¹ Surely God is aware of each and every circumstance that is tending toward evil, and he is able to intervene in each circumstance. So any nonintervention is a decision on his part, and these decisions are as particular as the events

permitted. Knowing he could intervene, that he had power and knowledge to do so, he declined to do so. So it is certainly not unwarranted to generalize from the above named cases to every case of evil: any actual evil would not have occurred but for an uncoerced, deliberate divine decision to permit it.

Which View of Providence Is Meticulous?

The Point of Comparison

The impression is often given that there is a near-total contrast between the kind of ‘meticulous providence’ that obtains on theological determinism (and Molinism) and the kind of more general ‘world-type’ providence that obtains on open theism. In my view, the desire to compare and contrast the open theist view of creation with these alternative views may lead open theists to radically restrict the possible points of comparison in a way that is arguably misleading. The analysis typically focuses on God ‘at the moment of creation.’ Given the presence of infallible foreknowledge, God knows exactly what he’s getting when he decides to create a world, down to the last detail; “he can count on getting exactly the world he plans for.”¹² But given the *absence* of such foreknowledge, per open theism, “the particular way things will go cannot be known in detail even by God prior to his decision about what sort of world type he will create.”¹³

Now, if the only relevant point of comparison is ‘at the moment of creation,’ it may seem that God’s ignorance of future events must be vast. But since on open theism God is temporal, he is continually making decisions as history unfolds and as his awareness of present human tendencies changes. And that implies that whether individual, morally evil decisions actually occur does *not* depend entirely on the decision freely made by the person at that time. Whether or not good decisions *actually* occur, or bad decisions *actually* occur, depends quite a bit on God’s ongoing decisions about what to *actually* permit. There seems to be no way around this.

Hasker seems aware of this point: “To be sure, God’s subsequent actions may play a very important role in shaping the direction of events, but the particular way things will go cannot be known in detail even by God prior to his decision about what sort of world type he will create.”¹⁴ But distinguishing God’s “decision about what sort of world type he will create” from “God’s subsequent actions” doesn’t help to avoid meticulous providence. Yes, “the particular way things will go” cannot be known by God *at the moment of creation*. But it will be known by God (or believed with a high likelihood of truth) *just prior to the choices themselves*, at precisely a time when God is in a position to prevent the choices. It’s not just that God’s subsequent actions ‘may’ play a very important role in shaping history; they *do* and *must* play this role, if in fact God has the awareness and power at every moment of history that open theists attribute to him.

A Concrete Example

To illustrate this point, consider a concrete example (sourced in Leviticus 10:1–3). At t_1 God sees that, according to a whole host of indicators of likelihood available to him, Nadab and Abihu are about to decide at t_2 to continue their rebellious activity of offering up strange fire (where t_2 is later than t_1). And with this knowledge, God permits them to continue. (In the next minute, however, he will eliminate them from the earth, at t_3 .) What actually occurs at t_2 is Nadab and Abihu's freely chosen but rebellious mode of worship. But is it right to say that what occurs at t_2 depends entirely on the decision freely made by the person at that time? That's not correct. It *also* depends on the decision God made at t_1 , his decision to permit what he knows (via his knowledge of probabilities) what is exceedingly likely to happen at t_2 . God's decision makes a difference here. If he decides to permit, then it is very likely that Nadab and Abihu rebelliously worship at t_2 . If he decides to intervene, then Nadab and Abihu will certainly not rebelliously worship at t_2 .

This is not the metaphysical equivalent of theological determinism. But it gives the lie to the notion that what actually occurs in such a world type depends entirely on the human agents and not upon God. There is a kind of dependence here that is much more meticulous than general divine concurrence. God has a say as to which world unfolds, and it's not just a say at the distant outset of history, when he decides to create a world, but a say *at every moment of history and for every moment of history*. One wonders, then, why natural order and free will are presented as buffers that insulate God from responsibility for the actual occurrence of evil. God's decisions at each moment of history 'make a difference' for each moment of history.¹⁵

'Meticulish' Providence

Since human nature is on the whole fairly predictable, especially if the predictor has total knowledge of the agent's present inclinations, motives, and external environment (as God does at each moment), then in the vast majority of cases of moral evil, God's *permissions* virtually ensure every actual case of it.¹⁶ And, of course, God's *interventions* will always eliminate the anticipated evil. Since God has a say at every moment as to whether he will intervene, he has a say at every moment as to whether there will be evil (since intervention precludes evil). And that's his call, each and every time. Similarly, since God has a say at every moment as to whether he will permit what he sees as likely, he has a say at every moment as to whether likely evil will become actual evil (since permission is always of events judged to be likely).

So at every moment it is *open* to God to eliminate all evil (by intervention). And at every moment it is *open* to God to virtually ensure all evil (by permission grounded in knowledge of likelihoods). When God permits evil, it's because he makes the call that the risk of permitting the choice outweighs

the bad effects of intervention: the undermining of his general goals for creation that would occur through intervention. That's surely God's call to make, but one can't pretend that it is without consequences for each and every evil in the universe.

So the real point of comparison, for the purposes of assessing divine culpability, is to compare the creational/providential decisions that God in fact makes in each system. On theological determinism and Molinism, the only relevant decision is the one, timeless willing of creation God makes logically prior to the moment of creation itself, since that decision selects for the entirety of the future. But on open theism, the point of comparison is not (merely) the initial divine decision to create in the absence of knowledge of likelihoods, but the innumerable subsequent decisions God makes in the *presence* of knowledge of likelihoods. And it turns out that such decisions have consequences as meticulous as that which obtains on theological determinism and Molinism. The fact that the divine decisions are spread out over time and are made in real time does not make them any *less* consequential or meticulous than the one all-embracing decision made on the other views. By restricting our focus to the initial creative decision, the open theist gives the impression that God's hands are tied (and so God's permission of evil is justified) by his enormous lack of knowledge at that moment prior to creation, while overlooking the enormous amount of knowledge (of likelihoods and near-inevitabilities) that God acquires in transit, as it were.

To summarize: The restriction of focus to the creational moment encourages the contrast between 'possible worlds' and 'world types,' such that on theological determinism and Molinism, God actualizes possible worlds, whereas on open theism, God at best actualizes a world type. "Presumably, [this is] a world type containing rich possibilities for the realization of important values—but God cannot guarantee in advance which total world scenario will result from his choice."¹⁷ But although God cannot guarantee the actualization of any specific possible world through any creative decision he makes at the *outset* of world history (and in this way open theism differs from theological determinism and Molinism), God *can* virtually guarantee the actualization of a specific possible world—and not just a 'world type'—by way of his providential decisions *as world history unfolds*. It is simply the case that at any time *t*, whether or not any natural or moral evil actually occurs at *t* depends upon God's prior decision to permit it. If God decides not to permit it, it won't occur, and so God's permission makes a difference here, in a context that seems just as meticulous as that envisioned by the theological determinist and Molinist at the outset of creation.

By stressing massive divine ignorance at the moment of creation, such that God's decision is restricted to planning a 'world type,' the impression is given that the rest are details exclusively filled in by humans. This grossly underestimates the meticulous nature of the 'passive providence' to which even open theists must be committed. This providence seems to be 'meticulish' even if

not meticulous, that is, close enough for the purposes of responsibility for the evil that actually occurs. It is a literal micromanagement, since on open theism God is a temporal being who continually updates his knowledge of individual moments and permits or intervenes accordingly. Even on open theism God's providential control operates at the 'micro' level (of individual creaturely choices) rather than at the 'macro' level that open theists tend to suggest in their talk of 'world types.'

Definitions

Call a theory of providence *meticulous* if, for every event that occurs in the universe, it only occurs because God ordained that it occur, where such ordaining is a deliberate, uncoerced decision on the part of God, a decision that was up to God and could have been otherwise. Call a theory of providence *meticulish* if, for every event that occurs in the universe, it only occurs because God permitted that it occur, where such permitting is a deliberate, uncoerced decision on the part of God, a decision that is up to God and could have been otherwise. It follows that theological determinist providence is meticulous whereas open theist providence is meticulish.

A theory of providence conforms to a *particularist greater-good theodicy* if, for every evil that occurs in the universe, God ordained or permitted that evil because it was necessary for bringing about a greater good or for blocking a worse evil. On a particularist greater-good theodicy, the outweighing goods that are brought about, or the outweighing evils that are blocked, are particular goods or evils.

A theory of providence conforms to a *general greater-good theodicy* if, for every evil that occurs in the universe, God permitted that evil because intervening to prevent it would have brought about a worse evil: the undermining of God's general policies toward the universe which aim at great goods for his universe, policies which are such that it is better for the universe that they be upheld in this instance than be undermined. On a general greater-good theodicy, the outweighing good that is brought about is the good of there continuing to be a universe in which God's general policies of endorsing natural order and free will are upheld, and the outweighing evil that is blocked is the evil of there being a universe in which these policies are undermined.

What I have argued in the preceding sections is that the general greater-good theodicy that obtains on meticulish open theist providence just as much precludes gratuitous evil as the particularist greater-good theodicy that obtains on meticulous determinist providence. Meticulish providence, non-gratuitous evil, and the normative premise of the evidential argument are all accommodated within rather than rejected by open theism, thus neutralizing these alleged advantages open theism has with respect to the problem of evil.¹⁸

Which View of Providence Undermines Moral Motivation?

The Offsetting Good Principle and the Principle of Divine Moral Intention

Proponents of meticulous divine providence who thereby reject gratuitous evil and accept the particularist greater-good theodicy seem committed to the following *offsetting good principle*: “Any harm resulting from a morally wrong action will be offset by a ‘greater good’ that God could not have obtained without permitting the evil in question.”¹⁹

But it seems quite plausible that, regardless of one’s view of theodicy, all Christians ought to be strongly committed to another principle “implicit in the biblical picture of God and God’s relationship to the world.”²⁰ This is the *principle of divine moral intention*: “It is an extremely important part of God’s intention for human persons that they should place a high priority on fulfilling moral obligations and should assume major responsibility for the welfare of their fellow human beings.”²¹

Open theists have argued that these two principles are in conflict.²² For if we really believed that the *offsetting good principle* obtained in God’s universe, then that knowledge would undermine our moral decision-making, and that would be at odds with the *principle of divine moral intention*. Since the latter principle is more secure than the former one, being more fundamental to the biblical revelation and its portrait of God, we have here a good argument *against* the *offsetting good principle*, and therefore against any scheme of providence or theodicy that implies it. Say what you will about ‘meticulish’ providence and ‘general greater-good theodicy,’ the evils in God’s universe *must* be gratuitous.

This is an interesting argument, and it deserves further reflection. One quick way of disposing of it is to point out that, if the argument of my previous two sections is correct, then simply *adding* an additional principle to God’s governance of the universe—such as the *principle of divine moral intention*—doesn’t automatically open the way for gratuitous evil, since God will simply make the call as to whether he will uphold or undermine *this* principle in specific situations. God aims at great goods in upholding the existence of the natural order and human free will, but that doesn’t keep him from intervening if he thinks such intervention won’t undermine his general policies of maintaining natural order and free will. Likewise for God’s principle that humans “should place a high priority on fulfilling moral obligations” and “assume major responsibility for the welfare of their fellow human beings.” In each case, if his intervention would undermine that principle then the evil would be permitted, otherwise it would not be permitted, and so the outweighing good of upholding the principle is what matters in these cases.

To illustrate, presumably God’s intervention to end the Egyptian oppression of the Israelites precluded the Israelites from assuming major

responsibility for the welfare of their fellow Israelites. He did not leave it to them to freely will various plans that would promote such welfare in that situation. Rather, he ‘took matters into his own hands’ and eliminated that moral evil altogether. Given the *principle of divine moral intention*, God must have judged that his intervention left that principle intact. More generally, for any of these principles you pick, the goods they aim at would either be undermined by God’s intervention (and so God permits the evil), or they wouldn’t be undermined (and so God eliminates the evil). There is a story like this to be told for every actual case of intervention and nonintervention, with respect to whatever principles constitute God’s general policies toward the universe, and that certainly seems to lead to the view that no evil is really gratuitous.

What It Takes to Undermine Moral Motivation

But beyond this, a more direct response is available, independent of the argument and analysis of the preceding sections: these two principles are not, in fact, in conflict in the first place, despite what might be the appearance that they are. Why exactly would my belief in the *offsetting good principle* undermine my moral decision-making? Hasker asks us to “consider the situation of an agent who is contemplating the commission of a serious moral fault.”²³ If she accepts the *offsetting good principle*, then she believes that, “whatever harm and suffering may result from a serious moral offense she might commit, the greater part of this evil (and perhaps all of it) is compensated by good results that could not have been obtained had she chosen a morally acceptable course of action instead.”²⁴ It follows that “morality is undermined for that person,”²⁵ for in contemplating the morally bad choice, and armed with the *offsetting good principle*, she will ask herself questions such as these:

Why should we ‘take responsibility for the welfare of those around us’? They are being taken care of already by God, so what is there to worry about?

Why should we care about ‘those to whom we are indifferent or antagonistic: given that someone has to suffer, why shouldn’t they be the ones’?

What possible reason could there be to relieve the victims of natural disasters or disease epidemics in remote parts of the world—individuals who are not and never will be known to us personally—if we know that whatever harm and suffering we thus prevent will simply show up somewhere else?

Why ‘provide for the needs of future generations—say, by not despoiling the planet of its resources . . .’? God, we may rightly say, has all that in hand, and nothing we can do about it will make any difference.

Proper faith in providence requires us to acknowledge that ‘The Lord is working’ even in such a happening [i.e., the racist bombing of a black

church]—and if the Lord is working, it behooves us his servants to keep out of the way.²⁶

In “The necessity of gratuitous evil,” Hasker summarizes the central argument implicit in the above questions:

Any harm which comes to any person is harm which *God has permitted for the sake of a greater good which will result from it* . . . Now, given that this is the case, *what sense could there be in principles prohibiting the infliction of harm?* An agent who is considering what might harm another person will know that *if* that person really is harmed, it will be *only* as a God-approved means to the creation of a greater good . . . Is it intelligible, then, that there should be moral principles prohibiting what, if it is done at all, can only be done with God’s approval and as an instrumentality of his purpose? I submit that this is *not* intelligible. But if no such principles can exist, then neither can moral obligations toward other persons exist. And so we reach our conclusion: *If God necessarily prevents gratuitous evil, then morality is undermined.*²⁷

Epistemic Constraints on Moral Motivation

In my view, Hasker’s key mistake is to *only* draw our attention to the following principle, implicit in greater-good theodicy: (1) If I were to harm P, then the world would be better off than if I hadn’t harmed P. But he seems to overlook the complementary principle that is also part of any greater-good theodicy: (2) If I were to refrain from harming P, then the world would be better off than if I had harmed P. *Both* of these principles would be true in a world governed by the greater-good theodicy, but Hasker seems to assume that only (1) can be true, that somehow (2) is excluded. But clearly they would both be true. It’s not as if the greater-good theodicy envisions God ordering the world in such a way that things are *worse* if I avoid harming people! God works all things for good, not just the bad things.²⁸

Assuming that both (1) and (2) are true, the key observation to be made is that, in my moral deliberations, I don’t know which will come to pass: the antecedent of (1) or the antecedent of (2). All I know is that *whichever* antecedent comes to pass, the consequent will come to pass as well. That in no way leads me to decide to actualize the antecedent of (1) *rather than* the antecedent of (2). I don’t know what God has ordained (or willed to permit) for the greater good. I’m in the dark about this, and that’s not due to some overly subtle ‘skeptical theist’ reasoning. It is uncontroversial that I do not know. But then the convictions of a theological determinist committed to the greater-good theodicy and the absence of gratuitous evil wouldn’t lead her in *either* direction with respect to harming P. Since these cancel each other out when it comes to motivation, any previous (independent) reasons for thinking that harming P is wrong or blameworthy come into play,

and *those* motivations are not undermined by my convictions about divine providence.

For example, God has told me, in the Ten Commandments and in the Sermon on the Mount, not to harm P. Or my parents reinforced this in my upbringing. Or I can just ‘see’ by moral intuition that harming P is wrong. These reasons for refraining from harming P all remain intact. So morality is not undermined after all. The epistemic possibilities are symmetric, and so they’re irrelevant as practical motivators or demotivators. Yes, as Hasker puts it, “Any harm which comes to any person is harm which *God has permitted for the sake of a greater good which will result from it.*”²⁹ But it is also true that “Any harm I prevent from coming to a person is a prevention which *God has permitted for the sake of a greater good which will result from it.*” And that makes all the difference in the world.³⁰

In general, there is a heavy epistemological constraint on any consequentialist ethic that seems to rob it of any practical application. A standard objection to utilitarianism, for instance, is that no one can perform the required calculus. At the very least, we should distinguish between divine consequentialism and human consequentialism. Even granting for the sake of argument that God is obliged to act so as to maximize the moral value of the world taken as a whole, it does not follow that we are obliged to act on the same principle. The epistemic distance between us and God would seem to indicate this, for while God is in a position to plan the world such that its moral value is maximized by way of his providential choices (including the ordaining or permission of evil), we certainly are not. We wouldn’t have a clue as to how to calculate this. “Act in such a way as to maximize the moral value of the whole world” seems to be a command we cannot intelligibly carry out, or even *intend* to carry out. So our moral motivation must come from another corner, as it were, and it is not surprising that the Scriptures do not seem to commend to Christians the ethic of consequentialism (as Hasker himself seems to indicate).³¹ But if so, then any inferences from God’s providential planning with respect to evil to our moral paralysis seem like *non sequiturs*.³²

Is Risky Providence *Worse* Than the Alternatives?

Unequal Risks

This chapter has sought to neutralize several alleged advantages of open theism over alternative systems of providence. Beyond this, does open theism do *worse* than theological determinism (or Molinism or other free-will theisms) when it comes to the problem of evil? There is some reason to think that it does, reasons grounded in *the morality of risk-taking*. Open theists often claim that we live in a universe in which *both* God and humans take risks, even as parents and children suffer in the midst of their relationship: “And there is the risk, indeed the near-certainty, that the child will inflict on

you considerable pain and suffering, as you strive to help the child become all that he or she can be and ought to be.”³³

But the risks here seem entirely unequal. God’s risk-taking exposes humans to risks that are much severer than the risks that God undertakes for himself, and this itself generates a problem of evil distinctive to open theism. For God’s part, by actualizing a world type in the absence of knowledge of how humans would respond, he risks *feeling sad* that humans do not do the right thing with respect to one another, and *being disappointed* that humans do not choose to enter into a relationship with him. In governing the world, he acts “in ways that expose him to the possibility of disappointment and failure.”³⁴ Creatures are capable of “bringing grief and suffering into God’s own life.”³⁵

By way of contrast, humans are exposed to a risk that is extraordinarily greater than mere feelings of sadness and disappointment; by *living within* a risky world every day, their very welfare and well-being is crucially at stake in a multitude of ways. Is God really taking a *similar* risk as to his own welfare and well-being? How? Is he subject to involuntary, tortuous pain for years on end, like so many of his creatures? No. Will he perish due to lack of food, water, shelter, and good health? No. Is it even possible that God makes a series of bad decisions in life and thereby consigns himself to an eternity of suffering? No. Even if humans reject God for eternity, the eternal loving fellowship within the Trinity is never at risk within the open theist’s scheme, while every possible friendship humans can have is at risk.³⁶ So what, actually, is the ‘risk’ that *God* is taking by embarking on the human project? He’s surely causing all of *his creatures* to live in a risky environment, one fraught with danger and suffering *for them*. But God is subject to none of it. Indeed, if things go really badly God can just destroy the world and that is that, but humans don’t have that option.

Of course, our best intuitions about the ethics of risk-taking do not support the view that we can *never* subject other persons to risk. But the risky environment needs to be equitable. If A subjects B to risk R, then B can rightly subject A to R. For instance, by simply driving my car in a city, I expose the residents to the risk of a car accident. But this is not objectionable, because these residents can rightly subject me to the same risk.³⁷ It seems pretty clear that the risks involved in the divine/human relationship on open theism are profoundly unequal, and therefore constitute a violation of this moral intuition. And this is a problem, for open theists are pretty concerned that the moral intuitions that apply to the divine/human relationship not depart too much from the moral intuitions that apply to human/human relationships, lest we lose our grip on what ‘good’ means in the divine context. Thus they

refuse to go along with the idea that God’s goodness is of a radically different kind than human goodness, in such a way that we can draw no conclusions about what a good God would do on the basis of what we would expect of good and morally admirable human beings.³⁸

Involuntary Risks

It might be thought that the problem is alleviated when we consider apparently acceptable cases in which the risks clearly *are* unequal. For instance, a military officer may command a soldier to take the next hill under heavy gunfire, while the officer stays behind in (relative) safety. Or a doctor may perform surgery on a patient who may clearly die from the procedure, but the doctor himself bears little risk. It is right to think that these cases are both common and morally acceptable. But they involve *voluntary* risk-taking on the part of the one subjected to the risk. The soldier volunteered to serve in the army. The patient asked for the surgery and signed a waiver of liability. There is no analogy here to the divine/human case. Rather, God thrusts humans into the risky world type he has created, and he does not ask them whether they would like to be subject their entire lives to an environment fraught with the potential for great suffering and loss.

One might think that open theists are free to flout these moral intuitions when developing their theory of providence, since after all God is our creator and providential sustainer, and in virtue of that acquires certain rights over us that are not and cannot be modeled in the realm of human/human relationships. The Creator/creature distinction underwrites the thesis of *divine transcendence*, and so moral obligations that we intuitively might think apply to humans simply do not apply to God. It seems to me that this move robs open theism of its characteristic appeal, which is that the problem of evil can be handled by stressing the moral *continuity* between God and creatures. If we abandon this moral continuity, the problem of evil suddenly becomes far more tractable on alternative theories of providence.

By way of contrast to these twin problems of unequal risk and involuntary risk, compare the thesis that all apparently gratuitous evils are in fact necessary for a greater good. While this claim may look implausible, it at least has the advantage of preserving certain *moral* claims we wish to make about God, since on this view God isn't taking risks at all. If someone *knew* that he'd make it across a ditch with a baby in his arms, and then jumped, but then someone else who *didn't know* if he'd make it across but *hoped* it'd turn out alright, jumped with the baby in his arms, surely the second action would be more subject to blame than the first.³⁹

Conclusion

I have been arguing that the alleged advantages of open theism with respect to the problem of evil have been largely neutralized in comparison with theological determinism, and in some respects open theism makes the problem worse. But what about libertarian free-will theisms that don't qualify as open theism? Shouldn't I have been showing that open theism isn't any better than *them*? But surely an *a fortiori* argument is in the offing here. If open theism isn't clearly better on the problem of evil than a position it

regards as a moral monstrosity—theological determinism—it's not likely to be preferable to other libertarian free-will theisms either. We must be clear, however, what the alternatives are for libertarian free-will theism: embrace complete simple foreknowledge and be irrelevant when it comes to providence, embrace Molinism and be risk-free when it comes to providence, or embrace open theism (or incremental simple foreknowledge) and be risky when it comes to providence. (Divine timelessness is either another version of simple foreknowledge, or it can be combined with theological determinism or Molinism, and thus be risk-free.) But regardless of how we carve up the 'libertarian free-will theist' terrain, open theism just doesn't seem to help when it comes to the problem of evil.⁴⁰

Notes

1. William Hasker and Paul Helm, "Does God Take Risks in Governing the World?" in *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Michael L. Peterson and Raymond J. Vanarragon (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 218–241, 219.
2. While David Hunt has offered examples of providentially useful simple foreknowledge, all of his examples are of 'incremental' simple foreknowledge, which I take to be a version of rather than an alternative to risky providence. Cf. "Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge," *Faith and Philosophy* 10, no. 3 (1993): 394–414; idem., "Prescience and Providence: A Reply to My Critics," *Faith and Philosophy* 10, no. 3 (1993): 430–440; idem., "Providence, Foreknowledge, and Explanatory Loops: A Reply to Robinson," *Religious Studies* 40, no. 4 (2004): 485–491; and idem., "The Providential Advantage of Divine Foreknowledge," in *Arguing About Religion*, ed. Kevin Timpe (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 374–385. Thus, *complete* simple foreknowledge *does* come too late for providential decision-making, even if bits of it can be used for providential decision-making as long as God does not have access to all of it (as Hunt argues in his 'incremental' simple foreknowledge examples). I thus agree with Dean Zimmerman that 'incremental' simple foreknowledge, while sometimes providentially useful, would be another version of risky providence. Cf. Dean Zimmerman, "The Providential Usefulness of 'Simple Foreknowledge,'" in *Reason, Metaphysics, and Mind*, eds. Kelly James Clark and Michael Rea (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 174–196.
3. Even if theological determinism and open theism are *not* the only options, surely if open theism isn't better than theological determinism (in the ways to be discussed), it's probably not going to be better than other views which share more in common with open theism than with theological determinism (such as the risky providence of 'incremental' simple foreknowledge). In the remainder of this chapter, I'll only be focusing on that subset of risky views that is open theism.
4. William Hasker, *The Triumph of God Over Evil* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 25.
5. Ibid., 93.
6. Hasker and Helm, "Does God Take Risks in Governing the World?" 223.
7. This paragraph summarizes the approach taken in Hasker, *Triumph*.
8. Hasker, *Triumph*, 205.
9. Michael Scriven, *Primary Philosophy* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 160.
10. As will be argued in the next section, it also generates a version of 'passive providence' that is just about as meticulous as any theological determinist version of

- ‘active providence,’ as this is a decision God makes with respect to every evil in his universe. It is God’s deliberate nonintervention that makes the difference here, in each and every case, rather than human free will having the final say.
11. The rock group *Rush* immortalized this point in their paean to “Freewill”: “If you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice.”
 12. Hasker, *Triumph*, 80.
 13. *Ibid.*, 81.
 14. *Ibid.*
 15. “We think of a cause as something that makes a difference, and the difference it makes must be a difference from what would have happened without it.” David Lewis, “Causation,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 70 (1973): 556–567, 557.
 16. The point is presumably strengthened in the case of natural evil, since laws of nature are not subject to the vicissitudes of libertarian free will.
 17. Hasker, *Triumph*, 82.
 18. Hasker recognizes a similar distinction among theodicies in “An Open Theist Theodicy of Natural Evil,” in *Molinism: The Contemporary Debate*, ed. Ken Perszyk (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 281–302, 282. His terminology is *specific-benefit theodicy* and *general-good theodicy*. But if I am right in these past two sections then—contrary to what Hasker assumes there—the distinction *doesn’t* make a difference when it comes to the problem of evil.
 19. Hasker, *Triumph*, 191–192; and William Hasker, *Providence, Evil, and the Openness of God* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 82.
 20. Hasker, *Providence*, 191.
 21. Hasker, *Triumph*, 191; and Hasker, *Providence*, 82.
 22. Hasker, *Triumph*, 192–195; and Hasker, *Providence*, 86.
 23. Hasker, *Triumph*, 196.
 24. Hasker, *Providence*, 196.
 25. *Ibid.*
 26. Hasker, *Triumph*, 192–194; and Hasker, *Providence*, 87–88.
 27. Hasker, *Triumph*, 65.
 28. The English Puritan Thomas Watson makes this point explicit in his exposition of the traditional view of Romans 8:28, where according to his first chapter “the best things work for good,” and according to his second chapter “the worst things work for good”. *All Things For Good* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), Originally published in 1663.
 29. Hasker, *Providence*, 65.
 30. In his discussion of atheist William Rowe’s objection that open theists must reject rather than allow for gratuitous evil, Hasker responds that such rejection would undermine morality, something a perfectly good God would not do. Hasker, *Triumph*, 195–197; and Hasker, *Providence*, 68–72, and 90–91. But if I am right in this section, then Hasker’s response misfires: an agent’s belief in the *offsetting good principle* (and corresponding disbelief in gratuitous evil) wouldn’t undermine morality at all.
 31. Hasker, *Triumph*, 188.
 32. The epistemic distance between us and God would also seem to answer Hasker’s query that “If consequentialism is rejected as a theory of ethics for human beings, why is it seen as being extremely plausible where God’s moral goodness is concerned?” Hasker, *Providence*, 188. Answer: God can actually apply it. More generally, my argument throughout this section is actually an extension of Hasker’s reasoning in response to D.Z. Phillips’s contention that theodicy in principle corrupts or undermines our moral motivations. *Ibid.*, 49–50. There, Hasker makes good use of the themes of epistemic limitation and non-consequentialist moral motivation. (It is worth pointing out that Hasker’s (dubious) argument that the offsetting good principle would lead to moral paralysis is analogous to

the argument that the ‘skeptical theist’ response to the problem of evil would lead to moral skepticism.)

33. Hasker and Helm, “Does God Take Risks in Governing the World?” 222.

34. *Ibid.*, 218.

35. Hasker, *Triumph*, 99. Of course, such feelings of sadness and disappointment may also characterize a God who governs by way of ‘incremental’ simple foreknowledge (ISFK), and if so, then my point in the text may apply to that view as well. In that case, open theism wouldn’t be worse than *all* other libertarian free-will theisms on this account; in particular, it wouldn’t be worse than ISFK.

36. *Ibid.*, 97–98.

37. For the car example, see section 5 of S.O. Hansson, “Risk.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2014 ed. URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/risk/>. For further elaboration of the moral principle involved, see S.O. Hansson, “Ethical Criteria of Risk Acceptance,” *Erkenntnis* 59 (2003): 291–309. Here I assume that an ‘equitable’ risky environment involves A and B being members of the same moral community. If B is a small child, or mentally insane, then he doesn’t have enough freedom, responsibility, or rationality to rightly subject A to risk R. But on open theism, God is taking unequal risks with free and responsible *adults*, and so the principle applies.

38. Hasker, *Triumph*, 28.

39. The illustration is from David Alexander.

40. Thanks to James Anderson, Paul Manata, and Steve Hays for their comments on an earlier version of this manuscript.

10 Open Theism and the Soteriological Problem of Evil

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The dominant conception of God found among analytical philosophers of religion has been that of ‘the personal omniGod,’ according to which God is “an all-powerful, all-knowing, wholly good person (a person without a body) who has created us and our world.”¹ Three main accounts of divine providence have been discussed in recent years: Calvinism (often called ‘Thomism’ or ‘Augustinianism’), Molinism, and open theism (sometimes called ‘free-will theism’ or ‘relational theism’).² A variety of accounts fall under each of these broad labels. An account of providence is, roughly, a story about how God runs the world. There has been increasing discussion, and comparative assessment, of the theological or practical implications of these three accounts of providence. My main aim in this essay is to continue this important discussion by considering ‘the soteriological problem(s) of evil.’ I will focus my attention on Molinism and open theism. After briefly describing the core components of their accounts of providence, I will distinguish different soteriological problems of evil and then consider what Molinists and open theists have said or can say about them. I will argue that open theism does not come out any better than Molinism here, and that Molinism may in fact be more beneficial—perhaps especially for those attracted to a universalist soteriology.³

Molinist and Open Theist Accounts of Providence

Molinism is named after Luis de Molina (1535–1600). In this essay, however, it is important to distinguish Molinism from the views held by the historical Molina.⁴ Minimally defined, Molinism is the thesis that God has middle knowledge. God has middle knowledge only if there are true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom (CCFs) that are contingent but outside his control. CCFs are conditional propositions stating, to put it loosely, how any creature God might create *would* (freely) behave in any set of circumstances in which that creature might be created and left free.

While Molinism, strictly speaking, doesn’t entail that any creatures are free—under Molinism it is possible that the CCFs that are true are so unfavorable for God that he decides not to create any free creatures—it would

be hard, if not impossible, to see why anyone would want to be a Molinist without a commitment to creaturely freedom. Molinism, on any standard interpretation, is committed to libertarianism, which (minimally defined) is the thesis that freedom is incompatible with (causal) determinism, plus the claim that at least some of our actions are free, and so determinism is false. Just what the libertarian's necessary and/or sufficient conditions for acting freely are or may be is a complex matter, but most require (at a minimum) the existence of alternative possibilities.⁵

Molinists are also committed to a strong traditional account of divine providence, often called a theory of 'meticulous' or 'specific' providence. This account, shared by Calvinists, entails the thesis, put roughly, that everything that happens is specifically intended or (else) permitted by God.⁶ For Molinists, God's creative decisions are guided by His middle knowledge of CCFs. CCFs (or maximal consistent sets of them) partition worlds into groups. Since God has no control over the truth-values of CCFs, it is not up to Him which (sets of) worlds are open to Him to create. But which of the worlds open to Him will be actual is completely up to Him.⁷ Since He knows by middle knowledge what each creature He might create would do in any possible situation in which that creature were placed and left free, He knows what He has to do to get the world from within the set open to Him that He wants. By selecting the 'right' combination of creatures to create and circumstances in which they are placed—that is, by actualizing the 'right' set of antecedents of CCFs—God decides which world open to Him is actual. In this way, middle knowledge allows us to explain how God can exercise 'complete' and 'specific' sovereignty over creation, and also have a guarantee that His providential plan will succeed, even if there are (contra-causally) free creatures. In addition, middle knowledge allows us to explain (at least in a nuts-and-bolts sense) how it is that God can have complete and certain foreknowledge of everything that occurs, including our free actions and their results, and how His foreknowledge is in part a function of His control: God's foreknowledge of our free actions follows from His middle knowledge of CCFs and His knowledge of which antecedents He decides to actualize.⁸

Like Molinists, open theists are committed to libertarianism.⁹ But unlike Molinists, they deny God's middle knowledge and foreknowledge of our free actions, though they maintain God's omniscience. Either there are truths about what we will freely do, but they cannot be known (by anyone), or there are no such truths to be known—propositions about our future free actions are all neither true nor false, or false.¹⁰ At any time, God knows everything that has happened and is happening, but he doesn't know everything that will happen. He might know in advance what free creatures will probably do, but He cannot know (and so cannot make creative decisions on the basis of knowing) what they will do or would do in different possible circumstances. The future is causally and epistemically open.

Open theists reject a doctrine of meticulous providence in favor of 'general' providence. We are told instead that God governs the world primarily

by having general strategies that become more specific as history unfolds and which are, overall, ordered for the good of creation but whose detailed consequences He neither intends nor foresees prior to adopting these strategies. Being omnipotent, God can and does at times intervene unilaterally in the world, but normally He does not appear to interfere with or override our freedom. God freely enters into give-and-take relationships with creatures; He interacts with and responds to creatures, allowing Himself to be conditioned by them and doing various things because of what they do. God is a genuine risk-taker in creation, opening Himself up to the real possibility of failure and disappointment, at least in terms of the specific way(s) His purpose is achieved or in the case of individual creatures. But He is also infinitely resourceful and omni-competent, and so we can rest assured that His overall or ultimate plan will succeed.¹¹

Soteriological Problems of Evil

Like the problem of evil, of which it is an extension or special instance, there isn't just a single soteriological problem of evil. Soteriology is the study of salvation. According to traditional Christianity, some earthly creatures will spend eternity in heaven, while others—apparently many others—will spend an eternity in hell. On one interpretation, the basic soteriological problem of evil just is the (logical) problem of hell: Is personal omniGod's existence logically compatible with the eternal damnation of any created persons? If God is perfectly good (loving), surely He would desire that all be saved; and if He is omnipotent, surely He would be able to save everyone. But if God were both willing and able to save all, none would be lost. Yet traditional Christianity maintains that some (many) are lost forever.

In the literature, the soteriological problem of evil is usually understood more narrowly, as a special instance of the problem of hell. On this reading, the soteriological problem of evil is not so much the problem of whether God's love (goodness), power or justice is logically compatible with the eternal damnation of any created persons, but whether it is logically compatible with a certain sub-section of the lost, viz. those who have never heard the gospel, or who are not the recipients of 'special' revelation (especially God's self-revelation in Christ as revealed in Scripture). It is 'the problem of the unevangelized.' On this interpretation, the eternal damnation of those who freely reject God's gracious offer of salvation through the expiatory death of Christ may be perfectly compatible with God's love (or power or justice)—God may be giving them what they want, with the doors of hell 'locked from the inside.' In addition, there may even be nothing necessarily unloving or unjust or unfair about the damnation of those who, while not recipients of special revelation, have not responded favorably to the 'general' revelation (God's indirect disclosure of himself in nature) that was available to them (where the bar is presumably set much lower than for those who have also received special revelation), though one might still feel a certain sense of

injustice or unfairness here, given that the chances of accepting God would (likely) be greater if one were the recipient of special and not just general revelation. The ‘real’ problem, they think, is the damnation of those who through no fault of their own never had the chance to accept or reject God’s way of salvation, perhaps because they never had access to the gospel, but who might or would (probably) have responded favorably to the gospel if they had heard it. Is this logically compatible with God’s love or justice?¹² It seems that such people would be the innocent victims of bad soteriological luck, given that the availability of special revelation depends on a range of circumstances that may be (largely) beyond one’s control, e.g., access to Christian Scripture or other literature, proximity to churches and missionary visits. Some see the soteriological problem of evil as wider than the problem of the eternal damnation of those who have never heard the gospel. That is, they see an additional problem of soteriological luck at play here, viz. the problem of those who hear about Christ but whose circumstances lead to very different likelihoods of a favorable response—e.g., they may reject Christ in the circumstances they actually find themselves and be damned, but they may or would (probably) have responded positively and been saved if they had lived longer or died sooner or had a different family environment or religious education, etc.¹³

Molinist and Open Theist Responses

Let’s consider what Molinists and open theists can say about these problems. My main interest is in whether one side comes out any better off than the other, by which I mean at least one or both of the following: (1) one side has an easier time (or less difficulty) than the other in solving or assuaging the problem (presumably because it is less susceptible to serious moral objections), and (2) one side has more resources available than the other to solve or to assuage the problem.

Let’s start with the soteriological problem of evil understood as the problem of hell. Let’s also suppose, for the moment, that Molinists and open theists wish to maintain a traditional doctrine of hell, or at least something approximating it. Otherwise, one and indeed both sides could respond to this soteriological problem of evil by simply denying that any will be lost forever. So far as I can tell, neither Molinism nor open theism entails that any will be lost, and in the next section I will consider the prospects of universalism for each. But as a matter of fact, Molinists and open theists tend to assume a traditional doctrine of hell (or something close enough), presumably on the ground that they think Scripture requires it.¹⁴

On this assumption, Molinists and open theists will presumably think they (individually or collectively) come out better off than Calvinists.¹⁵ They think Calvinists come out worse off with respect to the (ordinary) problem of evil¹⁶—e.g., by directly ordaining or causing everything that occurs, God turns out to be the author of sin or at the least is not nearly as opposed to

evil as Scripture represents him as being. When it comes to the damned, their fate (under Calvinism) is ultimately due to God's decree to withhold the efficacious grace that would have been sufficient for their election. It is hard, if not impossible, to see how such a God could be a morally perfect (loving or just) agent. If He is able to save all persons but doesn't, it must mean that He doesn't love all persons or will all to be saved. And it seems perverse to damn those whose rejection of your offer of salvation is something you knowingly caused. It seems that the best one can do here is to appeal to mystery.

More importantly for my purposes, open theists think that they come out better off than Molinists on the (ordinary) problem of evil.¹⁷ So they will presumably think the same with respect to the problem of hell (and other versions of the soteriological problem of evil).¹⁸ It is not hard to see why it looks like Molinists come out worse off here, and correspondingly why open theists appear to come out better off. If God knows CCFs whose consequences state that creatures freely reject His special or general revelation, and He goes ahead and actualizes their antecedents and thereby ensures the damnation of those creatures, it is hard to see how such a God could be the supremely good moral agent. If anything, He appears guilty of malice aforethought. He could have prevented their rejection of Him just by not actualizing the antecedents of the relevant CCFs, or by not creating the creatures in question. He would not need to have control over the truth-values of CCFs to do this. If, on the other hand, there are no true CCFs and so God does not have middle knowledge, He did not know (logically prior to creation) that any free creatures would reject His offer of salvation and so be lost forever. This seems to make God less responsible for their damnation.

But is it really so? To indict the Molinist God, open theists appeal in part to the intuition that the more an agent knows, the higher we set the standards for their actions. To exonerate a God without middle knowledge, they appeal in part to the intuition that the less an agent knows, the less responsible they are for their actions. But this is hardly the end of the story. Without middle knowledge, it seems that God is a risk-taker if He creates significantly (contra-causally) free creatures. Molinists and others find this element of risk-taking unacceptable, even if it is not reckless. It may be morally acceptable to risk serious harm in the case of pre-mortem evil, if e.g., you can compensate or defeat that evil should it occur. But it wouldn't follow from this that it is morally acceptable to risk the irreparable post-mortem harm of others—and by hypothesis here the evil of hell is irredeemable. The eternal destiny of creatures is serious business, and caution (not luck) is arguably morally required, especially in the light of cognitive limitations. Satisficing arguments are typically more forceful the less an agent knows. If God didn't know what any free creature would do, would He create them? If for all He knew every one of them might freely reject His gracious offer of a personal relationship with Him, would He create them? It's not obvious that He would, or that doing so is compatible with perfect goodness. Both

Molinists and open theists who accept anything like a traditional doctrine of hell seem open to the charge that it would have been better to have left well enough alone and not created any (contra-causally) free creatures (or it may have been better to create creatures who were caused to freely accept his offer and so be saved). In addition, both sides are open to the charge that (with or without middle knowledge) God could and should have intervened to prevent the final act of impenitence of any free creature He did create.

Of course one might not agree with (some of) the above value judgments. But it is hard to see that either side is really any worse off than the other here.¹⁹ On the one hand, the risk-taking God of open theism cannot, it seems, ensure that a single person freely accepts His offer of fellowship. Some will find it morally objectionable to create free creatures under this condition. On the other hand, it is also the case that the open theist God, unlike the Molinist God, does not ensure (via actualizing the relevant antecedents of CCFs) that any person freely rejects His offer of fellowship. Some will find this an advantage of open theism. The alternative to risk-taking is to do nothing at all, or at least not create any (contra-causally) free creatures. While worlds without such creatures would have been open to God, it is presumably logically possible that such worlds were among the least good worlds God could have actualized.²⁰ Molinists could say the same, and when it comes to the charge that (under Molinism) God could have actualized a world with a better balance or mixture of saved and damned, they can reply that it was logically possible that such worlds simply weren't open to God.

It is not easy to see how one could establish that risk-taking is logically incompatible with perfect goodness. Hasker, for example, thinks that the necessity of risk-taking follows from God's love for his creatures.²¹ Must the open theist God be a reckless risk-taker?²² He might be if He didn't have a clue that any creatures would freely accept His offer of fellowship, or if for all He knew every creature might be lost forever. But, aside from being cautious in speculating about what would count as soteriological success or failure for omniGod, must the soteriological prospects without middle knowledge be as dire as Molinist propaganda might lead us to believe? Even if God did not know what creatures would do (with respect to accepting or rejecting his offer) if He created them and left them significantly free, He might have known what they would probably do. If God knew conditional probabilities and went with the creative option with the likely best soteriological outcome or near enough, the risk would not seem to be reckless, especially if the conditional probabilities for success were very high. He might also have been armed with a host of contingency plans in case of surprises. Open theists do not seem to agree among themselves on the extent of God's risk-taking. However, they presumably want to avoid the charge that God was a reckless risk-taker without landing themselves in something near enough to Molinism. Otherwise they would not come out any better off than Molinists here. If they eschew would-probably conditionals entirely, and so God didn't have a clue what free creatures would do, the reckless

risk-taking objection seems decisive.²³ Alternatively, the lower the conditional probability of a sufficiently good soteriological outcome, the harder it would be to avoid the charge of recklessness. Yet there would seem to be good empirical and practical reasons for not wanting the conditional probabilities of creaturely soteriological choices to be too high or well defined logically or temporally prior to creation. Otherwise, open theists won't be significantly any better off than Molinists here. To try to avoid this, and the charge of recklessness, open theists typically move to a picture whereby God actualizes the world in stages based on what has gone before, present tendencies, and so on. But, arguably, this only shifts the problem closer to the time creatures make their soteriological choices. The open theist God must see very clearly the consequences of His actions and omissions (lack of interventions) as creation unfolds. He must have a very good idea that some (many? most?) creatures will freely reject His gracious offer—as the conditional probabilities of their bad soteriological choices verge on certainty close to the time of their choices. Why then doesn't He intervene? Open theists are likely to appeal to the value of significant freedom in responding to the charge that God should have overridden creaturely freedom when it became apparent that it would be used to reject fellowship with God. But this sort of story is also available to Molinists when faced e.g., with the charge that God could have simply withheld freedom in those cases in which He knew that creatures would reject God's offer of fellowship, and granted it when He knew that creatures would accept it. It seems that however one tries to defend anything like a traditional doctrine of hell, neither Molinists nor open theists have resources that the other doesn't also have available.

Does this mean that we simply have a draw with respect to the problem of hell? Not necessarily. A traditional doctrine of hell includes a no-escape thesis: there is no escape from hell once one is there. Christianity speaks of a final consummation of all things, and so their doctrine of the afterlife is pervaded by the concept of finality. But what accounts for this finality? And in particular, are Molinists and open theists equally placed to account for it?²⁴ A traditionalist might say that infinite punishment is warranted, and that this explains or accounts for the finality of hell. But suppose one moves away from a punishment model of hell to a choice or natural consequence model whereby hell is the natural result or consequence of our choice to reject God's offer of fellowship with Him. God doesn't so much consign us to hell; we choose it for ourselves. Molinists and open theists are, as I said earlier, libertarians. Molinists can explain the finality of hell in terms of CCFs: an individual's CCFs are such that no matter what God did they would not choose to leave hell or would not make whatever choices may be necessary for leaving.²⁵ This move isn't of course available to open theists. What can they say? One option is to say that creatures are free only up to a point, and then God's decree puts an end to the openness of the future for those who have 'chosen' hell, and God's decree thereby explains the finality of hell. On this scenario, one's being in hell might initially be a choice or result of one,

but the inability to escape from hell won't be a choice. One might, however, in keeping with the choice model prefer to explain the finality of hell in terms of one's choices and not God's decree. It seems that if open theists don't want to restrict or remove our freedom, they must buy into a 'loss of soul' theory to try to explain the finality of hell. The idea is that at some point the damned have lost their freedom; as a result of their choices, they have become so hardened that they cannot turn to God no matter what God did.

But does this work? Kvanvig does not think so.²⁶ If the loss of soul were an unintended consequence of one's previous choices, he thinks God could intervene to restore the capacity to choose union with God. For this to begin to work, one must directly intend to lose one's soul, and one's autonomy to do so must be so valuable that it would not be appropriate for God to intervene. But Kvanvig does not think this will really do either.²⁷ First, he wonders why the inability any longer to choose union with God isn't simply a boundary that can be approached but never actually be reached. Second, even if we admit that this point can actually be reached, what kind of impossibility is this? It may be psychologically impossible to choose union with God. Maybe. But that sort of impossibility does not imply the loss of freedom for libertarians. We would need to reach the point where the choice of union with God is causally (nomologically) impossible, but loss of soul theorists have not provided any good reasons for thinking this, or for getting from psychological impossibility (if it really is psychologically impossible to choose union with God) to causal impossibility.²⁸ If Kvanvig is right, then it looks like Molinists are better able to account for the finality of hell.

The idea, without CCFs and God's knowledge of them, that God would give up on free creatures is problematic: if they are contra-causally free, they might at any time change their minds or act out of character and choose God. Without middle knowledge, God cannot know that a person would not freely turn to Him if He left the door to salvation open longer. So why slam the door if for all you know they might still choose union with you? Knight argues that given the presuppositions of open theism, the time when God gives up on any given sinner is entirely *ad hoc*, and the idea of giving up on the salvation of creatures who might still choose redemption is morally objectionable.²⁹ He thinks that if God desires that all be saved, open theists must give up the no-escape hypothesis associated with the traditional doctrine of hell. Molinists, then, have an easier time maintaining something like the traditional doctrine of hell.³⁰

This leads into the other soteriological problems of evil, i.e., whether omniGod's existence is compatible with the eternal damnation of some who never hear about Christ, which raises issues of soteriological luck. Traditionally, one's soteriological fate is sealed at bodily death. In addition, salvation is only possible through Christ (Christian exclusivism), and typically one must not only knowingly accept Christ—DeRose calls this "strong exclusivism"—but also freely accept him (DeRose calls this "fervent exclusivism").³¹ Some people seem to resist Christ until the end, i.e., their death; others appear

never to accept Christ in part because they never had the opportunity to hear about Him. Without true CCFs and God's (middle) knowledge of them, God couldn't know that a person would (knowingly and freely) accept Christ if placed in different circumstances (that include hearing about him). But it would still be true, and so presumably known by God, that a person might or would probably (freely) accept Christ in these different circumstances.

To try to avoid problems of soteriological luck (or the problem of the unevangelized), an open theist could insist that at some point all persons will have an opportunity to hear Christ. The opportunity may occur 'at the moment of death' (cf., e.g., the Roman Catholic 'final option' theory). Or perhaps it will occur post-mortem (where this post-mortem evangelization may or may not be open only to those who responded favorably to the general revelation they received while alive). There is nothing to stop Molinists from following suit, unless they have good reason to be committed to the traditional doctrine of 'no further (i.e., post-mortem) chances.' They might still admit the possibility of a (first) chance 'at the moment of death.' If some still don't freely accept, perhaps they are damned and have no legitimate complaint about God being unfair or unjust or unloving—we are then back to the original problem of hell. An open theist might try to avoid problems of soteriological luck by simply denying Christian exclusivism, but that may be a heavy cost—e.g., if Scripture requires it. Alternatively, they might accept exclusivism but deny 'strong exclusivism' and endorse instead what DeRose calls "weak exclusivism"³²—what others³³ call "inclusivism": salvation is only through Christ but there is no need for an explicit conscious acceptance of him. But—even assuming this position isn't unbiblical—it seems that not all respond favorably to general revelation, and so we are back to the original problem of hell and have not entirely avoided problems of luck.

What can an open theist who believes that some or many will never hear the gospel and be lost forever say? Answer: God took a gamble and did the best he could to redeem them, though it is possible that some (many?) of those who are lost might or would probably have been saved if things had been different. While Basinger thinks this is just as, but no more, plausible than any Molinist response,³⁴ Hunt thinks it is more plausible,³⁵ though he also seems to think that gambling on our eternal destiny is unacceptably risky. Craig, on the other hand, thinks open theism is much worse off: aside from making God out to be 'the epitome of moral recklessness,' the open theist God

seems peculiarly indifferent to the fate of the billions of people who have never heard the gospel and most of whom are therefore lost, but who, for all he knows, might receive Christ were they only to hear of him, and yet whom He passes over in relative neglect, content to provide them only inefficacious general revelation.³⁶

Anderson argues that open theists are impugned on the problem of soteriological luck, whereas Molinists are not.³⁷

There are at least two Molinist accounts on offer here. The first is Craig's 1989 account. On this account, those who receive general (but not special) revelation but do not respond positively to it would also not have responded positively to the gospel if they had heard it. All who want or would want to be saved will in fact be saved; i.e., no one who would respond positively to Christ if he were to hear the gospel will be denied the opportunity (i.e., be placed in circumstances in which they fail to hear it and are lost forever). No one is lost who would under any (other) circumstances respond positively to the gospel and be saved. In other words, via His middle knowledge God prevents anyone's being lost through the accidents of the place or time, etc., in which they find themselves. This is not to say that one is saved or damned (in part) on the basis of what they would have done (unlike the Molinist option to be considered next).

Now, Craig's Molinist account has of course been criticized on a number of fronts. For example, Adams denies the possibility of 'transworld damnation' on which it relies—the thesis that it is possible that the unevangelized are such that they would have failed to respond positively in every world open to God in which they heard the gospel.³⁸ And she thinks that even if it were logically possible, the various candidate propositions that would entail that some created persons do not receive Christ and are damned are not themselves compatible with omniGod's existence. While I myself am sympathetic to Adams's value judgments here—e.g., that God would be cruel if via middle knowledge he brought some, not to mention possibly the vast majority, of humans into being for lives it would have been better for them never to have lived—and I myself have no wish to defend anything like a traditional doctrine of hell, my main worry here is that Craig's solution doesn't entirely eliminate the problem of soteriological luck.³⁹ I'm not just talking about God's bad luck, i.e., the possibility (under Craig's proposal) that God was unlucky when he surveyed the CCFs that were true and over which he had no control. Commiserating with an unlucky God may have its own problems. I'm more concerned about the bad luck of those who find themselves in a world actualizable by God. For Craig's solution to work, the same CCFs must be true in every world open to God. Otherwise, God wouldn't be constrained by CCFs or possibly get stuck by the hypothesis of transworld damnation. But there are possible worlds in which the CCFs that happen to be true are false. If they were true in all logically possible worlds, they would be necessary, not contingent, truths, and so not the objects of middle knowledge. Possible worlds in which true CCFs about the unevangelized are false—worlds in which they freely accept God if given the chance—must be open to them if they are genuinely free, though they must not have been open to God. But then it seems that the unevangelized in this world have good reason to regret that they are in this world or to regret that it was actualizable by God. They, or we on their behalf, would seem driven to say that it would have been better for them if this world hadn't been actualizable by God.⁴⁰

Anderson proposes an alternative Molinist account to solve the problem of soteriological luck.⁴¹ The key idea here is that one's soteriological profile is not determined merely by what one actually does, but also by what one would do in different circumstances.⁴² On this account, the unevangelized are saved provided there are possible worlds in which they do hear the gospel and accept Christ. Objections have been raised against this. Craig (1995) e.g., thinks it would be unjust (and unloving) to judge a person on the basis of their counterfactual moral or soteriological profile instead of on the basis of what they have actually done. Hartmann (2014) objects on the ground that it trivializes the actual world in key respects, making it inexplicable why we must have pre-mortem lives to begin with (and so presumably raising the ordinary problem of evil with a vengeance). And if that isn't bad enough, the idea seems to be incompatible with Scripture. For my purposes, the most interesting implication of Anderson's proposal is that, as he acknowledges, it would seem to lead directly to universalism. So let's turn to the issue of universalism, for it is here that I think Molinists might make their biggest contribution.

Universalism for Molinists and Open Theists?

Christians have been divided over how bearable it would be if not all (human) persons are saved. Universalism is the thesis that all persons will (eventually) be saved. While Christians may hope, and perhaps even pray, that universalism is true, the traditional view is that it is false. But let's assume, at least for the sake of argument, that universalism offers the best solution to soteriological problems of evil.⁴³ What are the prospects for universalism for Molinists and open theists?

Molinism does not by itself entail that some persons will freely reject God and be lost, nor does it entail that all will freely accept and be saved. Nevertheless, Molinism is well suited for universalism.⁴⁴ This seems to be particularly the case for that version of Molinism known as 'Congruism,' according to which (following Suarez) God doesn't seem constrained by the truth-values of CCFs but uses His middle knowledge, roughly, to get what He wants. If He wills that all are saved, He can use his middle knowledge to figure out how to provide each creature with just the right sort or amount of supernatural aids that will get the creature's free consent to His will and thereby be saved. But given its commitment to libertarianism, it seems that Molinists cannot deliver necessary universalism—the thesis that it is logically necessary that all will (eventually) be saved—but only contingent universalism (i.e., as a matter of fact all will be saved).⁴⁵ This also assumes that freely accepting God is required for salvation. However, even if contingent universalism were the best that God can do under Molinism, he would know prior to creation that all persons would (will) be saved. It would thus be something he could reveal in Scripture, which defenders of universalism presumably believe has been done.

What can open theists say? While it doesn't appear to be logically inconsistent for an open theist to maintain universalism—why couldn't God hit the soteriological jackpot?—there seems to be a tension in doing so. Does the open theist God take risks, soteriologically? Given standard open theism, one would think so. Unlike Talbott, Sanders believes that God continues to be a risk-taker when it comes to our eternal destinies.⁴⁶ But perhaps it is no more problematic for an open theist to be a universalist than it is for a standard Molinist to be one, for the latter would also appear to hold an asymmetry, viz. between the way CCFs function as constraints on God in this life (e.g., to account for pre-mortem evil), but not when it comes to our ultimate destinies. In addition, it seems that neither standard open theists nor standard Molinists can agree with Talbott that the idea of a person making a fully informed free decision against God is incoherent. The libertarian theory of freedom they endorse seems to require that even when there is no good reason or motivation to refrain from doing something, and every reason or motivation to do it, we could (must) still be able to do otherwise.⁴⁷ I suspect the added dialectical reason for open theists to insist on this is that they think it supports the infamous 'grounding objection' to Molinism.⁴⁸ In any case, perhaps this only shows that neither open theists nor Molinists can be necessary universalists.

But unlike Molinists, it doesn't seem that open theists can say that God could know that all will be saved, especially if free acceptance is required for salvation. There are strong reasons for open theists (and Molinists) to require such acceptance. For example, they think personal relationships require freedom, and salvation involves a personal relationship with God.⁴⁹ If God could know that all will be saved, why think (as open theists do) that our free will is incompatible with God's foreknowledge of our (free) acts? And if God cannot know that all will be saved—can he even foreknow any of his own free actions under open theism?⁵⁰—would it be compatible with perfect goodness to reveal it?⁵¹

Whether God could know that all will be saved seems to depend in large part on how God achieves universalism. Leaving aside the possible use of middle knowledge, there are two main ways discussed in the literature for God to achieve it: (1) the use of efficacious grace to ensure creatures' acceptance, even if it requires limiting or trumping their freedom, and (2) working on the unregenerate for as long as it takes to secure their free acceptance.⁵²

Arguably, without middle knowledge, universalism cannot be certain for God without a limitation or elimination of creaturely freedom (at least from the perspective of a libertarian theory). Talbott⁵³ and Adams seem quite prepared to say that those who do not freely choose God will eventually have their freedom trumped and God will decree their salvation for them.⁵⁴ Freely accepting God would be better, so having to trump/eliminate creaturely freedom would be a cost. Without middle knowledge, God wouldn't know that the creatures in question wouldn't have freely accepted him if they were given more chances. One who allowed God to trump our freedom

as a last resort to secure the salvation of all would also need to explain why God wouldn't trump our freedom much earlier or more often to prevent pre-mortem evil. Kvanvig (2011, 16 and 51f) also objects that the universalism in question is only *ersatz* universalism. Coerced salvation doesn't really amount to universalism at all but as strong a mitigation of the experience of hell that can be imagined.

At other times, Talbott rejects the idea that God would have to violate creaturely freedom to secure universalism.⁵⁵ God can ensure that we freely accept Him. Removing all ignorance, deception, bondage to desires, etc. don't violate our freedom but establish necessary conditions for it. While Talbott says he has libertarian proclivities, the sort of 'free' acceptance that God can guarantee here is not something open theist (or Molinist) libertarians would endorse. Talbott's view may not be compatibilism in sheep's dress, though it surely looks like it. But either way, open theists would be very hard pressed to continue to deny God's foreknowledge of our free acts if they accepted anything like Talbott's view.

But can't an open theist remain a libertarian in good standing and think that without middle knowledge an infinitely resourceful God can still guarantee universalism by preserving the unregenerate for as long as it takes to get their free acceptance? Eric Reitan thinks so.⁵⁶ Given the idea that our freedom contains an ineradicable random element, to ensure universalism he thinks God only needs to strip away those salvation inhibitors He can prior to salvation, sustain every person's temporal existence until they choose Him, and leave the choice for Him open. As the timeline approaches infinity, the probability of any person not choosing God approaches zero. Given infinite time, and assuming that apostasy isn't possible once saved (which is traditional), it is thus mathematically certain that any individual person will be saved. And the argument will generalize for all (human) persons. If one objects that at best the probability that any individual continues to reject God approaches zero but doesn't actually reach it, and so at any time there is still some non-zero chance that one will reject God, we are told that we have what amounts to a practical or rational guarantee that all will eventually be saved; it would be crazy to think otherwise.

I don't have the space to consider Reitan's argument in the detail it deserves, so I will need to be brief.⁵⁷ For a start, I think one needs to exercise great caution in drawing metaphysical conclusions from mathematics of probability theory in the context of infinite time. It may be rational to hope for universalism, but does this epistemic defense of universalism really deliver the relevant guarantee? DeRose concedes that one has to compromise either a bit on the requirement that universalism requires free acceptance (God can know all will be saved even if not all freely accept—He might need to compel any holdouts to accept) or a bit on universalism (it may be overwhelmingly probable that all will be saved, but not guaranteed).⁵⁸ Kvanvig raises several issues for arguments such as Reitan's.⁵⁹ Most importantly, the argument relies on a detachment rule for probabilities (that

allows us to detach p from a high probability for p), but such rules fail in the case of the lottery and preface paradoxes. And even if we admit a very low probability of rebellion in any given case, an agglomeration step is needed to get to universal salvation, but it is rare for the probability of a conjunction to be as high as the conjuncts. The upshot is that it looks like there is no logical guarantee of universalism for open theists without some limitation on creaturely freedom. Molinism doesn't entail universalism, for there can be no guarantee (given contra-causally free creatures) that the truth-values of CCFs will be that favorable for God. But if God loves all persons and wants all to be saved, it wouldn't be unreasonable to believe that He wouldn't have actualized the world unless He knew that all would be saved. Without middle knowledge, it is hard to see how God could have known this.

Conclusion

I conclude that it is reasonable to believe, though not beyond reasonable doubt, that Molinism has an edge over open theism in addressing soteriological problems of evil. An anti-Molinist might agree, and also agree that other things being equal, one account of providence is preferable to another if it makes it easier to solve soteriological problems of evil. But, such an anti-Molinist will insist, other things are not equal: e.g., Molinism is logically incoherent!⁶⁰ A complex set of factors is involved in the overall (comparative) assessment of theories of divine providence—a consideration of theoretical and practical virtues and vices, best fit with Scripture and whatever other sources one may consider authoritative, etc. It is true that if a view is not logically coherent to begin with, the practical benefits of the position are otiose. But it is also the case that the more practical benefits an account of providence has, the less persuasive one may find the theoretical objections to it. There needn't be anything intellectually suspect about this. I don't expect that hardened anti-Molinists will have a Damascus road experience reading this or numerous other attempts to demonstrate the practical benefits of Molinism on a wide range of topics and admit the error of their ways. But perhaps they ought to be less confident of the force of their theoretical (and practical) objections to Molinism. At the least, I encourage those who have yet to take sides in the Molinism Wars to take a closer look at the bigger picture.

Notes

1. Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.
2. Process theism is often added to the list, but I will not consider it here—as interesting and important as I think it is as an alternative to the personal omniGod conception. While it agrees that God is, literally, a person or personal agent, insofar as it denies creation *ex nihilo*, it denies the supernatural/natural dualism of the personal omniGod conception—as creator of all else that exists, the personal omniGod is ontologically distinct from the creation—and God's agential

power falls short of omnipotence. I also set aside simple foreknowledge and timeless knowledge.

3. For the sake of full disclosure, I am not a Molinist, but would be one if I were a personal omniGod theist and a libertarian.
4. For example, Molina himself maintained a version of the traditional doctrine of hell, but that is not entailed by Molinism.
5. Of course this too is controversial. Some so-called Frankfurt libertarians follow Harry Frankfurt in rejecting the Principle of Alternate Possibilities. See, e.g. Kevin Timpe, *Free Will: Sourcehood and Its Alternatives* (London: Continuum, 2008) for a discussion. Molinists, however, certainly accept (and indeed must accept) PAP or something PAP-like, and so far as I'm aware, open theists also accept it.
6. Following terminology laid out in Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1974), everything that happens is either 'strongly' or 'weakly' actualized by God, where God can *weakly* actualize a state of affairs S if and only if there is some state of affairs S* God can *strongly* actualize (roughly, cause to be the case), such that if God were to strongly actualize S*, S would obtain. Alan Rhoda defines meticulous providence as the thesis that God ordains (strongly or weakly actualizes) all events. Cf. Rhoda, "Gratuitous Evil and Divine Providence," *Religious Studies* 46 (2010): 281–302, 283. For alternative Open Theist definitions of 'meticulous' or 'specific' providence, see e.g. William Hasker, *Providence, Evil, and the Openness of God* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 115f; and John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 211–212.
7. This is the sense in which Molinists say that God exercises 'complete sovereignty' over everything that actually occurs. This is weaker than what Calvinists mean by 'complete sovereignty'. Having complete control over which world open to God is actual is different from having complete control over everything that happens in any world God chooses to actualize. See Neal Judisch, "Meticulous Providence and Gratuitous Evil," in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 65–83, 81–82 for the importance of this in assessing a standard open theist argument for the claim that Molinism makes the problem of evil worse.
8. For a much more detailed presentation of the Molinist account of providence, see e.g. Thomas P. Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).
9. Alan Rhoda, "Generic Open Theism and Some Varieties Thereof," *Religious Studies* 44 (2008): 225–234, 228 prefers not to include a commitment to libertarianism in his definition of 'generic open theism,' but as I noted in the case of Molinism, it would be hard, if not impossible, to see the motivation for being an open theist without it.
10. For these three varieties of open theism, see Dale Tuggy, "Three Roads to Open Theism," *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007): 28–51.
11. For more details on the standard Open Theist picture of providence, see e.g. Clark Pinnock et al. *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994); Sanders, *God Who Risks*; and Hasker, *Providence*, especially chapters 6–8. Open Theists disagree amongst themselves on the extent or frequency of God's unilateral interventions in the world, and so also the extent of God's risk-taking. For further discussion, see Rissler 2006. On his 'hopeful' view of Open Theism, God risks disappointment but does not risk failure. His purpose in creating was just to invite us into personal relationship with him, which God hopes we will accept. Even if no creature freely accepted the offer, God's purpose would still be a success. I suspect Molinists would not be alone in seeing this as a *reductio* of "Hope'n Open Theism" (as Judisch, "Meticulous Providence," calls it).

12. For this way of framing the soteriological problem of evil, see William Lane Craig, "'No Other Name': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 172–188; and David Basinger, "Divine Omniscience and the Soteriological Problem of Evil: Is the Type of Knowledge God Possesses Relevant?" *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 1–18, among many others.
13. See David Hunt, "Middle Knowledge and the Soteriological Problem of Evil," *Religious Studies* 27 (1991): 3–26.
14. Some open theists (e.g., Pinnock) plumb for annihilationism instead of endless conscious suffering/separation from God. Again, Molinists could follow suit.
15. Jerry L. Walls, "Is Molinism as Bad as Calvinism?" *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (1990): 85–98 argues that Molina's theory of providence and predestination is better off than Calvinism, i.e., it is not beset with the same sort of disturbing moral implications. However, he thinks it still fails to give a satisfactory account of God's goodness and will to save all persons, and so he proposes an amended version of Molinism.
16. See e.g. Hasker, *Providence*, 111–112, 118. For the view that Open Theism doesn't do a better job with respect to the problem of evil, see Paul Helm, "The Philosophical Issue of Divine Foreknowledge," in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will* (Vol. 2): *Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce Ware (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 485–497. Steven C. Roy, "God as Omnicompetent Responder? Questions About the Grounds of Eschatological Confidence in Open Theism," in *Looking Into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eshatology*, ed. David W. Baker (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 263–280, 279 claims that Open Theists are in worse shape than Calvinists. Also see Paul Kjos Helseth, "On Divine Ambivalence: Open Theism and the Problem of Particular Evils," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2001): 493–511. William Wainwright argues that Arminians (Molinists) are exposed to much the same sort of difficulties as Calvinists are. Cf. Wainwright, "Theological Determinism and the Problem of Evil: Are Arminians Any Better Off?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 50 (2001): 81–96.
17. See, e.g., Hasker, *Providence*, 114–120. Dissenters include Edward Wierenga, "Review of *The Openness of God*," *Faith and Philosophy* 14 (1997): 248–252; Flint, *Divine Providence*; Ken Perszyk, "Free Will Defense With and Without Molinism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43 (1998): 29–64; and Perszyk, "Molinism and Theodicy," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 44 (1998): 163–184; Jonathan Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), xi–xiii; Judisch, "Meticulous Providence,"; and Greg Welty, "Open Theism, Risk-Taking, and the Problem of Evil," in this volume.
18. Though he is not himself an Open Theist, David Hunt argues that Molinism makes the soteriological problems of evil worse. Cf. Hunt, "Middle Knowledge," and for replies, see Basinger, "Divine Omniscience," and William Lane Craig, "Middle Knowledge and Christian Exclusivism," *Sophia* 32 (1995): 120–139.
19. One might say that at least with middle knowledge God would know what would have happened if he had intervened in any given case.
20. If this reply to the reckless risk-taking objection is combined with an appeal to the 'anthropic risk principle'—if God hadn't taken a risk, we wouldn't be here to complain about it—one might, however, protest that at least from the perspective of those who suffer the irredeemable horror of hell, it would have been better if they had never existed.
21. William Hasker, "Response to Thomas Flint," *Philosophical Studies* 60 (1990): 117–126, 123–124.

22. This appears to be Craig's assessment in "Middle Knowledge and Christian Exclusivism."
23. Unless one radically alters God's purpose in creating along the lines of James Rissler, "Open Theism: Does God Risk or Hope?" *Religious Studies* 42 (2006): 63–74.
24. The main points in this paragraph rely heavily on Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation*.
25. See Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation*, 9–10 and 30.
26. Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation*.
27. *Ibid.*, 34–40.
28. Gordon Knight, "Universalism for Open Theists," *Religious Studies* 42 (2006): 213–223, 216 appears to reject the coherence of loss of soul theory on the ground or supposition that freedom is an essential part of the human condition, and so is not something that can be given up.
29. *Ibid.*, 214–217.
30. Whether Molinists (or anyone else) can provide a satisfying defense of a traditional doctrine of hell is another matter. If I were a personal omniGod theist, I would be a universalist. Kvanvig notes in *Destiny and Deliberation* that he has lost his earlier Molinist faith and argues (in chapter 8) that his epistemic theory of creation has all the advantages of Molinism but without its oversized baggage. Gordon Knight argues that while Molinism—when attached to a traditional doctrine of hell—may offer a slight improvement over Calvinistic predestination, it doesn't escape the problem of hell. Cf. Knight, "Molinism and Hell," in *The Problem of Hell: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. Joel Buenting (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 103–114.
31. Keith DeRose, *Universalism and the Bible: The Really Good News*, 1999. URL = <http://pantheon.yale.edu/~kd47/univ.htm>.
32. *Ibid.*
33. See, for instance, John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation Into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 282–283.
34. Basinger, "Divine Omniscience," 16–17.
35. Hunt, "Middle Knowledge," 26.
36. Craig, "Middle Knowledge and Christian Exclusivism."
37. Mark B. Anderson, "Molinism, Open Theism, and Soteriological Luck," *Religious Studies* 47, no. 3 (2011): 371–381.
38. Marilyn McCord Adams, "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians," in *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann*, ed. Eleonore Stump (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 301–337.
39. So far as I can tell, this also applies to Hartman's extension of Craig's proposal. Cf. Robert J. Hartman, "How to Apply Molinism to the Theological Problem of Moral Luck," *Faith and Philosophy* 31, no. 1 (2014): 68–90.
40. This assumes of course that worlds in which no creatures reject God (and all accept) are possible and better than a (this) world in which some never accept. The odd theological consequence above also seems to apply to any version of the Free Will Defense (Theodicy) that concedes that worlds containing moral good but no moral evil are possible and better than this world.

Though this goes beyond the problem of the unevangelized, and so beyond the narrow brief Craig sets for himself, it seems that bad luck enters a Craigian Molinist account in other ways. E.g., in the case of those who became apostate during their lives, couldn't God have used his middle knowledge to arrange for their deaths in the nick-of-time before they became apostate? A Molinist would no doubt concede this is logically possible, but presumably insist that it is also logically possible that if God had done this, things overall might or would have

- been no better, and possibly worse, off. Enter an appeal to the possibility of bizarre patterns of CCFs being true. This may be good enough for mere defense, but not if more is required.
41. Anderson, "Molinism, Open Theism, and Soteriological Luck."
 42. *Ibid.*, 375 points out that the idea that one's moral profile includes not only what one actually does but would do, can be found in John Greco and Michael Zimmerman. Anderson's Molinist application of this idea to the problem of the unevangelized can (absent his details) be found in evangelical writers in the 1970s and 1980s. For references, see Sanders, *No Other Name*, 168–169, notes 36 and 37.
 43. The *locus recens* for the rehabilitation of universalism is Thomas Talbott, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (1990): 19–43, and many papers and a monograph since.
 44. Calvinism is too, as Hasker e.g. noted quite some time ago. Also see Oliver Crisp, "Augustinian Universalism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 53, no. 3 (2003): 127–145, who argues that rejecting Augustinian universalism generates a serious problem of evil for Augustinians.
 45. Might Molinism be able to deliver something in-between? Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation*, 57–60 argues that 'feasible universalism' fails. Unfortunately, I don't have the space to get into this complicated issue. At first blush, one would think that a Molinist might have some wiggle room here. One thing we've learned about counterfactuals is that evaluating them is often highly context-dependent. The accessibility relations on worlds for God and us will be different. Some worlds will be open to us but not to God, and vice versa. Perhaps the biggest trick or obstacle is to show that it is possible that among the *possible* worlds not open to God but open to us are all those in which creatures freely reject God and are damned.
 46. John Sanders, "A Freewill Theist's Response to Talbott's Universalism," in *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*, eds. Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 169–187, 178.
 47. If libertarians themselves wonder aloud how such freedom could be so valuable, compatibilists in the room will be grinning from ear to ear.
 48. For a survey of this and other objections to Molinism, and of Molinist replies, see Ken Perszyk, "Recent Work on Molinism," *Philosophy Compass* 8 (2013): 755–770.
 49. This doesn't entail salvation by good works or the idea that creatures merit or deserve salvation.
 50. Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 177 thinks it is impossible for there to be an omniscient person who is perfectly free.
 51. Peter van Inwagen, "What Does an Omniscient Being Know About the Future?" in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jonathan Kvanvig (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 216–230, 230 worries about whether a morally perfect being could promise that an event would happen if that being knew that the probability that it wouldn't happen was very low but non-zero.
 52. See John Kronen and Eric Reitan, *God's Final Victory: A Comparative Philosophical Case for Universalism* (London: Continuum, 2011) for a thorough and comprehensive discussion of these ways. They briefly consider and quickly dismiss Molinism, apparently buying into the grounding objection (133).
 53. Talbott, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," and elsewhere.
 54. Adams, "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians," 317 asks, rhetorically, whether it is not overly anthropocentric, another manifestation of the idolatry of human agency, to think that it is so valuable that God would accept unredeemed horror to include it.

55. Talbott, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," and numerous other places since.
56. See e.g. Eric Reitan, "Human Freedom and the Impossibility of Eternal Damnation," in *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*, eds. Robin A. Parry and Christopher H. Partridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 125–142; and his "A Guarantee of Universal Salvation?" *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007): 413–432, and also Kronen and Reitan, *God's Final Victory*, chapter 8. Talbott, in his, "Reply to My Critics," writes that he "would urge any reader who wonders how one might square so-called libertarian freedom with the *certainty* of universal reconciliation to read [Reitan's] chapter carefully" (2003, 247–248).
57. For Reitan's own replies to some objections, see his "A Guarantee of Universal Salvation?" 424–430 and his co-authored *God's Final Victory*, chapter 8.
58. DeRose, *Universalism and the Bible*, Appendix 2: Free Will and Universalism.
59. Kvanvig, *Destiny and Deliberation*, 23–25.
60. Adams, "The Problem of Hell: A Problem of Evil for Christians," 317 suggests that if she believed CCFs could be true, she would appeal to Suarez's doctrine of congruent grace to secure universalism.

11 Jesus Didn't Die for *Your* Sins

Open Theism, Atonement, and the Pastoral Problem of Evil

Keith Wyma

This argument addresses the intersection of open theism and the pastoral problem of evil. That is, the problem of answering a believer's doubts about whether God is trustworthy, given experiences of evil in that believer's life. Greg Boyd's articulation of open theism serves as the basis of discussion here because, as a pastor in addition to being a theologian, he particularly focuses on the pastoral implications—and, in his view, advantages—of the open position. I shall argue that, in spite of what Boyd claims, open theism's implications actually make the pastoral problem of evil more difficult. This difficulty affects God's trustworthiness in His moral character, specifically His love for us shown in Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

Let me be clear that I shall *not* be arguing against the biblical basis of open theism. Boyd presents evidence in favor of the biblical consistency of open theism; I believe there's a strong case to be made for not reading the Bible that way, but that's a job for a biblical scholar, not me. Nor will I argue that open theism diverges from orthodoxy or denies God's omniscience. As Boyd and I made clear when we debated in 2008, we both regard the nature of future free actions—and their impact on what can logically possibly be foreknown by omniscience—as a matter on which orthodox Christians can disagree in good faith, at least when orthodoxy is understood in a Lewisian sense of “mere Christianity.”¹ Boyd and I agree that reasoning about God should never consider Him anything less than the greatest that we can think, and, indeed, should recognize that God's nature is in important ways *beyond* the greatest we can think. Our disagreement concerns what concept of future free actions fits best with that shared Anselmian goal for thinking about God.² Nor am I investigating difficulties of open theism within the resources of generic theism or any kind of theism other than Christian. Within a Christian framework—in fact, within a largely Reformed framework—my argument will focus on open theism's ability to respond to the pastoral problems created by experiences of evil.

The Pastoral Problem of Evil

Philosophers and theologians generally frame the problem of evil as calling into doubt whether there can *exist* (or whether we can rationally *believe*

there exists) a wholly good, omnipotent, and omniscient God, given evils so obvious in the world. However, there is another crucial aspect of that problem, as evidenced in the ancient texts of Job and Psalms. For example, as he suffered, Job didn't question whether God existed; he questioned whether God was *trustworthy*—whether God was *fair* or *cared for him* or was *effectively in charge of the world*, after all. Job lamented,

Is it that . . . deliverance is driven from me? . . . Have I sinned? What have I done to Thee, O watcher of men? Why hast thou set me as Thy target, so that I am a burden to myself? The just and blameless man is a joke. . . . The tents of the destroyers prosper, and those who provoke God are secure.³

The psalmists repeatedly echoed (and strove to answer) this complaint. David cried, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.”⁴ Asaph told how his “feet came close to stumbling” as he considered “the prosperity of the wicked”—“When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight.”⁵ Or consider Psalm 88: “[M]y soul has had enough troubles, . . . and Thou hast afflicted me . . . But I, O LORD, have cried out to Thee for help . . . why dost Thou reject my soul? Why dost thou hide Thy face from me?”⁶ Many other passages could be cited, but these suffice to show what's variously called the *existential* or *personal* problem of evil on the part of the sufferer.⁷

Those responding to the believer's distress then face the *pastoral* problem, which Peter van Inwagen has defined in this way: “problems that confront those who, in virtue of their clerical office or some other relation to a person, regard themselves as responsible for the spiritual welfare of that person when that person encounters evil.”⁸ Van Inwagen notes how the personal problem raises doubting questions about how to “continue to love and trust God,” and how the pastoral problem then presses the spiritual mentor to offer guidance and some kind of answer to those doubts.⁹ It is just that task that Boyd addresses in the work I examine here. To some degree those answers—though they must be practical and not philosophical, as van Inwagen wisely admits—can be helpfully informed by the work of philosophers and theologians.¹⁰ And Boyd hopes open theism will help supply those answers.

Historically, such existential questions have been much more prevalent responses to evil than simply doubting God's existence, and thus the pastoral response to them is essential to Christian life. Given that even Richard Dawkins, an ardent defender of the rationality of atheism, has said that atheism became an intellectually satisfying explanation of its own only with the advent of Darwinism,¹¹ it's easy to see how believers who valued intellectual fulfillment in prior ages wouldn't have considered rejecting God's (or something divine's) existence as a believable option. In the midst of suffering or life's apparent unfairness, believers often haven't asked—and even now don't ask—whether there *is* a God; they may have numerous other

reasons, arguments, and experiences to convince them there is. Instead, they find themselves asking whether they can *trust* God. Is God just? Does God really care about them? Is He really working for their good? Is God really in charge? In short, *should God's sovereignty be trusted in their lives?* The summary question breaks down into two component categories: (1) Is God *morally* trustworthy in His rule? And (2) is God *sufficiently able* in His rule, for us to trust our lives wholly to it? The first category covers doubts about the love and justice of God's plan for us, the second covers doubts about whether God can carry out that plan. The pastoral task is to find what resources Christianity has to assuage these doubts.

Moreover, I believe presenting a solid pastoral response to the existential problem of evil is crucial because the failure to address the pastoral problem easily leads to the more fundamental doubts about God's very existence, characterized in the standard philosophical problems of evil. I've known people who have walked away from the faith in response to their encounters with life-rending evils. But they didn't start by denying God's existence. The experiences undermined their trust in God, their confidence that God really loved them or that God's rule in their lives could be relied upon. When those doubts weren't assuaged, then, after they had distanced their daily lives from dependence on God, 'God' devolved into a concept not worth believing in, anymore. My own life exhibits the priority-need of pastoral responses, as well. My struggles with faith don't concern whether I can rationally believe in God but concern exactly these matters of trust. I wrestle with experiences of my own evil, whether—or how much—God really loves me through all my (continuing) rebellion and failure. And I wrestle with experiences of evil befalling me. When my leg was crushed in an accident a few years ago, I found myself questioning God: "If this is what Your loving care is like, why am I trusting You to direct my life? Or to take care of my children?" Like other believers, I need pastoral responses to help me with these worries.

Within the pastoral problem, my argument will narrow to focus only on God's *moral* trustworthiness and not the trustworthiness of His sovereign ability. Also, in dealing with the trustworthiness of God's moral character, I'll focus principally on God's love. I'll touch on God's justice, but I'm not primarily going to treat that here, for two reasons: (1) the interests of brevity and thematic unity in this argument, and (2) that I've written elsewhere on questions related to God's justice.¹² With the subject matter clarified—and since I'm assuming the reader's familiarity with the basic ideas of open theism—I'll move to Boyd's argument that open theism helps deal with evil in its pastoral difficulties.

Boyd on Open Theism and the Pastoral Problem

In describing how open theism addresses the problem of evil, Greg Boyd repeatedly stresses the importance of the practical effects of philosophical-theological positions. He writes, "the pragmatic viability of a theory is one

test of its truthfulness,” and that a “person’s mental picture of God is the most important feature of his or her belief system. This picture determines how we relate to God, for better or for worse.”¹³ He further thinks that a non-open view of God’s foreknowledge “contributes to a harmful picture of God,” as I’ll shortly explain.¹⁴ On the other hand, the open view of God or the future may not “entirely solve . . . the [pastoral] problem of evil,” but Boyd believes “it offers the most plausible way out,” again, for reasons that we shall soon see.¹⁵ Boyd is also concerned to address objections that open theism may have “pastoral disadvantages,” writing, “As a pastor, I am sensitive to this charge.”¹⁶

Boyd builds his defense, of open theism’s pastoral advantage in responding to experiences of evil, in the context of two stories. As he says, the best way to make his point about practical implications is with “real-life illustration[s].”¹⁷ First, he relates that his father, an agnostic, once asked him “why God would allow Adolf Hitler to be born if he foreknew that this man would massacre millions of Jews.”¹⁸ Second, and more centrally, Boyd tells of a woman, “Suzanne” (not her real name), in his church who was deeply angry at God and on the edge of losing her faith. “Suzanne had been raised in a wonderful Christian home and had from a very young age been a passionate, godly disciple of Jesus Christ.”¹⁹ However, she had married a man, after much prayer and attempt by her and others to discern God’s will, which she had felt supernaturally confirmed. But her husband had then repeatedly cheated on her, abandoned their shared dream of missions, abused her, and finally left her—though she was pregnant—for another woman.²⁰ Boyd writes,

The worst part of it was how profoundly the ordeal had damaged her previously vibrant relationship with the Lord. Understandably, Suzanne could not fathom how the Lord could respond to her lifelong prayers by setting her up with a man he *knew* would do this to her and her child.²¹

Suzanne did not believe that she could have misread God’s will, since it had been confirmed for her in the clearest way she could have wanted. Nor could she accept that she was supposed to learn something from the events, since “[the] ordeal didn’t teach her anything; it simply left her bitter.”²² How could Boyd pastorally aid Suzanne and his father?

Boyd argues that no help could emerge from any view of God’s foreknowledge that implies a complete set of definite specifics about future, human actions. In fact, he counters that such positions—which he characterizes as the “classical views” of foreknowledge—only make things worse for questioners like Suzanne and his father. For if God knows in exact detail what humans will (or even would) do, then He must intentionally allow each evil that occurs.

Here, I must insert two interpretive notes because Boyd is rather careless in his terminology on this point. First, many positions on foreknowledge and freedom might be designated as “classical views” in Christianity’s history on the subject. Yet those views differ, and some are further from Boyd

than others. Which, then, does Boyd mean? Among others that Boyd might directly oppose is the Reformed view growing from Calvin's theology, which strongly affirms God's full and definite foreknowledge as well as His complete, providential sovereignty over human actions. With a few variations, that's the position I'll be dealing with as the classical view. Second, Boyd sometimes treats the classical view as implying that human evils are things God *intends*, e.g., "*everything* that occurs in world history is *exactly* what God *wanted* to occur . . . [T]hings such as sin, child mutilations and people going to hell are all in accordance with God's will" or are "ordained by God."²³ Other times he acknowledges the distinction between what God intends and what God *allows* (God's *direct* vs. *indirect* will), e.g., "classical theologians have proposed a number of different reasons why God *allows* suffering."²⁴ Obviously, the latter is the more charitable characterization, and is a point Boyd has to accept into his own view, as well.²⁵

Still, even on the more charitable reading, Boyd argues that the classical view implies "there is a specific divine purpose for every specific event, including specific evils" because God would have seen each one coming and would have had—and needed to have—a reason for allowing that evil to occur.²⁶ In other words, the classical view doesn't provide "any real comfort in the face of the scary aspects of the world" because those evils are seen as "ordained by God" [note Boyd's confused terminology continues].²⁷ Instead, fully specific, comprehensive foreknowledge seems to "make God a co-conspirator" in the occurrence of evil.²⁸ But, Boyd contends, it "is *this* conclusion more than anything else that creates the problem of evil."²⁹ In fact, at one point, Boyd writes that the "vast majority of Christians reject [such a strong conclusion] in horror."³⁰ If God knows events like the Holocaust or horribly failed marriages are *definitely* going to occur and lets them, it puts His love and trustworthiness that much more in doubt. It makes it seem like evil is something God *wants* in the world.³¹

On that account, Boyd thinks open theism is better able to address pastoral problems. Once believers realize God has merely probabilistic knowledge of our future, free actions, those believers can see that God didn't put them in situations—like, say, Suzanne's marriage—while either intending or even definitely knowing that the situations would turn out like that. Boyd recounts that he told his father that Hitler's genocidal actions were "not foreknown as a certainty at the time that God created Hitler."³²

He also describes his counsel to Suzanne, stressing that at the time that God confirmed Suzanne's plan to marry, God had good reason to believe the marriage would work, given what kind of person Suzanne's prospective husband was then:

[God did not make] a bad decision—at the time, [Suzanne's] ex-husband was a good man with a godly character. The prospects that he and Suzanne would have a happy marriage and fruitful ministry were, at the time, very good. Because her ex-husband was a free agent, however,

even the best decisions can have sad results. Over time, and through a series of choices, Suzanne's ex-husband . . . had become a very different person from the man God had confirmed to Suzanne to be a good candidate for marriage. This, I assured Suzanne, grieved God's heart as least as deeply as it grieved hers.³³

God, fully and only intending the best for Suzanne and her husband, had made a good faith recommendation based on the most complete information then available even to omniscience. Because our future free actions and their impacts only *can* be known as probabilities, God's flawless analysis of the then-current probabilities had yielded not a certainty of marital success, but excellent odds for it, upon which God confirmed the marriage plan. God had not expected the bad outcome, which *surprised* and dismayed even Him, as the nation of Israel's actions had during the times of the prophets.³⁴ Thus God was not only grieved by the ex-husband's actions, God *regretted* having made the recommendation, just like God's regret (in I Sam. 15) over having made Saul king of Israel.³⁵ However, that didn't mean God's recommendation had been wrong. God had "infallibly thought" that a good marriage had "the greatest chance of occurring"; and God had been *right* about that *likelihood*, even though it had "turn[ed] out that a less likely possibility actually occur[red]."³⁶ Boyd doesn't say how his father responded, but he ends Suzanne's story this way:

By framing the ordeal within the context of an open future, Suzanne was able to understand the tragedy of her life in a new way . . . Her faith in God's character and her love toward God were eventually restored and she was finally able to move on with her life.³⁷

Boyd locates open theism's advantage, in responding to the pastoral problem of evil, in the relationship between love and freedom as characterized by the open view. God is responsible for creating a world that includes indeterministically free creatures. He is then responsible for the risk of evil which that freedom entails, but God is *not* responsible for the evil those free creatures do.³⁸ Other positions than open theism might claim this, too, but Boyd regards the open view as better being able to defend it, since the risk of evil from freedom is merely that, a *risk*, even in God's understanding. Other views would seem to entail that God *knew* His "risks" would be actual evils from the beginning, and so is more responsible for them.

Boyd continues that God's risk with libertarian freedom was justified because a world that includes such freedom, even with the evils that then become possible, is better than a world without.³⁹ And the basis of that superiority is the enabling of *love*. Boyd writes,

Love has to be [freely] chosen, and this means that love is inherently risky . . . [because] love *must* be chosen. It could not be otherwise. It's part

of its very definition. As a triangle must have three sides and all bachelors must be unmarried, so love must be chosen. This means that love is, by its nature, very risky. To create a cosmos populated with free agents (angels and humans) who are capable of choosing love requires that God create a cosmos in which beings can choose to oppose his will, hurt other people, and damn themselves. If love is the goal, this is the price.⁴⁰

In short, Boyd's open view presents freedom as *logically necessary* to enable love, so even God's omnipotence could not secure love without the risk of evil, and love is worth the risk. Moreover, after the freedom is in play, God could not take it back without invalidating its whole point: "To take back freedom *once it is given* on the grounds that it is being used wrongly would mean that freedom was never given in the first place."⁴¹ Boyd's wording is too strong, here, but we can see a basic point that if God took back the gift of freedom, He would also be destroying creatures' ability to love Him, which would negate God's original intention in giving the freedom.

So, on Boyd's characterization of the open view, God could not have been certain before creation that the freedom would be misused, that people would do evil, let alone persist in it to their own damnation. After creation, the freedom couldn't be abrogated without invalidating its original intention to enable love. God's choice to make us free was, itself, loving and aimed at enabling loving relationship with us. What we've done with our freedom is our fault, not God's. Thus, Boyd sets out his case that open theism helps answer the pastoral questions that experiences of evil raise about God's trustworthiness: "The solution to the [pastoral] problem of evil, I believe, is found in this insight."⁴² "That," he submits, "is a God you can trust."⁴³

As we shall now see, however, not only does God's love become less trustworthy in the open position Boyd defends, Boyd's characterizations of key concepts in that position close off the lines of response he might want to take to those problems.

The Classical View Regarding God's Love in the Atonement

In contrast to Boyd, I argue that open theism makes the pastoral problem more difficult in supporting God's trustworthiness, regarding the love He expresses for us in Christ's death on the cross. That problem then undercuts our certainty about God's love more generally.

Christ's atoning death is not merely the center of Christian theology, it's also the definitive demonstration of God's love for us. The Incarnation shows God loves us enough to accommodate Himself to us by taking on our nature. Jesus' ministry displays God's concern for our needs and His desire to heal our infirmities and afflictions. The resurrection shows the Father's acceptance of Christ's work on our behalf. But in the crucifixion, most particularly, Christ shows how far God will go in His love for us. As Paul so succinctly put in in Romans 5:8, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while

we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”—a theme multiply repeated in the New Testament.⁴⁴ This fact is incredibly important to the pastoral problem because it bases the moral justification of God's sovereignty over our lives. What Christ did for us is *the* answer to questions of why we should trust and obey God. As Karl Barth wrote in *Church Dogmatics*, in the event of Christ's death God showed beyond all question that He is “God-for-us,” and *that* is the ground of God's sovereign claim over us.⁴⁵

Boyd has it wrong: we may recognize God's blessings in daily life, but we don't *principally* discover God's love for us by looking for God's purposes (or lack thereof, for Boyd's position) in the specific good and bad events of our lives. We find it in the cross. The cross is where God's love is ultimately defined and demonstrated. It is in light of Christ's sacrifice that we trust God's plan for our lives. Christ's death on the cross establishes both God's *justice*—He does, indeed, hate and punish wrongdoing—and even more, His *love*, in satisfying the punishment on our behalf.⁴⁶ With regard to the trustworthiness of God's moral character, Christ's death definitively answers our doubts about God's love for us.

Now, notice the full impact of Christ's atoning death, as considered under the classical account of God's foreknowledge. God's complete foreknowledge includes not just an exact understanding of *who* will exist throughout the world's history, but also *the exhaustive list of definite and specific, sinful actions* those people will perform. When Christ went to the cross, he bore the burden of our sins. In at least the Father's view (the extent of the incarnate Jesus' knowledge being a mystery to us), Jesus' death was for *each and every one* of us.⁴⁷ To put it a different way, Jesus died for *you* and me, *particularly*.⁴⁸ And not only for us as specific individuals, but for *each and every sin* we have committed and will commit, no matter how many or how vile.

How great is God's love in this picture? God knew *you* as a *concrete, real person*, including every reprehensible action that would make you feel ashamed and unworthy and beyond the pale, every selfishly manipulative prayer, every half-hearted attempt at following Jesus, every repeated failure, every sin held onto, *everything*—and every act of it a murderous rebellion against Him, since it would cost the death of the Son to make it right. Knowing all that, God, in Christ, chose to suffer humiliation, torture and agonizing, public execution for *you*. Hallelujah!

When my children were smaller, I often read them a well-known, bed-time story about a little hare asking his father how much he loves him. For every limit the little hare imagines, the father always loves him more—not just all the way to the moon, but all the way to the moon *and back*. With my kids, the story always generated our own competition of how much we loved each other: “All the way to Saturn!” “All the way to Pluto!” Eventually, of course, someone says, “To infinity!” And that's just what God did in Christ's atoning death, in a trumps-everything-possible move—at least as understood in the classical framework, which fits with the traditional concept of substitutionary atonement that is a key part of Reformed theology, as well as

Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Baptist, and others.⁴⁹ Martin Luther described it in dynamic imagery:

[O]ur most merciful Father . . . sent his only Son into the world and laid upon him the sins of all men, saying: Be thou Peter that denier; Paul that persecutor, blasphemer and cruel oppressor; David that adulterer; that sinner which did eat the apple in Paradise; that thief which hanged upon the cross; and, briefly, be thou the person which committed the sins of all men; see therefore that thou pay and satisfy for them.⁵⁰

Contemporary theologian J.I. Packer then spells out the implications of this substitution:

[I]f the true measure of love is how low it stoops to help, and how much in its humility it is ready to do and bear, then it may fairly be claimed that the penal substitutionary model embodies a richer witness to divine love than any other model of atonement, for it sees the Son at his Father's will going lower than any other view ventures to suggest. . . . [The painful and humiliating] death on the cross . . . is common to all views, and tells us already that the love of Jesus, which took him to the cross, brought him appallingly low. But the penal substitution model adds to all this a further dimension of truly unimaginable distress [of standing in God's judgment for each sinner and each sin], compared with which everything mentioned so far pales into insignificance.⁵¹

The unimaginable length to which God's love went to at the cross wasn't a boast or a probabilistic projection, but a concrete demonstration for *each* of us. *That's* how much God loves *you* and me.

This demonstration is why I said, above, that the primary place for us to look for God's love isn't in the events of our daily lives, by asking whether they seem to match a good, divine purpose. Both Suzanne and Boyd seem to have made that mistake. Rather, we trust God through those daily events, no matter how they appear, *because of the love shown us in Christ*. After my leg-crushing accident, the doubts it has raised for me always run into that love. At times I find myself wondering, "Is God really looking out for me? Given what He's allowed to happen to me, is His guidance of my life really loving?" But at a deep level, I simply can't believe that the Person who would do all that for me, who would—and actually *did*—go to such unimaginable lengths and pains *for me*, doesn't love me. I can't believe that after all that horrifically agonized effort, which includes atoning for actions yet-to-be-done by me, God would abandon me or act to harm or destroy me now.

The loving character shown in this picture of the atonement is inconsistent with a God who would act harmfully to me in other circumstances. Does it make sense to think that a God who, in complete foreknowledge of me and my sin, died for *me*, will now turn His back on me in disgust or

frustration? No. Does it make sense to think that a God who would go to this most extreme length for me would then fail to follow through in caring for me in the ways that would be *easier*—i.e., less self-sacrificial—for Himself? No. If from the very beginning, God has foreknown and carried out this plan of atonement, infinitely costly to Himself, does that leave me plausible reason to suppose His intentions toward me would change? No. When I feel sick at myself and my continuing sin, I remember that demonstration of love; God knew all of this information about me, and yet Christ still died for *me*. My or *your* sins can't surprise God, now, or cause Him to regret His decision on my behalf. God's love for *you* and me has already passed the ultimate test; *you* and I can utterly rely on it to abide through life's traumas. That's the picture the classical view of God's foreknowledge yields of Christ's sacrificial death. I submit that it provides a great help in responding to the pastoral problem of evil because it definitively establishes God's love for each specific one of us in all of our specific un-loveliness. Luther called this model of atonement "so sweet and filled with comfort."⁵²

As I said above, my argument principally focuses on God's moral trustworthiness as evidenced in His love, and I'll return to that. But let me note that the classical view of God's foreknowledge exalts God's concern for *justice*, as well. To further elaborate the substitutionary model in its penal aspect: God loves us throughout our sinning, yet God's justice and righteousness are dissatisfied with, and repelled by, our sin. A penalty has to be paid for our wrongs, a penalty ultimately only satisfied by death, as the Bible says repeatedly and from the first.⁵³ Nevertheless, in His love Christ substituted Himself in death in our places. In the fact that Christ died for specific sinners who would otherwise have died to pay for their specific sins, it indirectly shows how much God hates sin. This is a God who thoroughly and relentlessly opposes evil. He is aware of, and calls to full account, every single sinful action and thought. Yet His manner of instituting justice actually removes the guilt for our wrongdoing, which our own consciences charge us with. As Packer puts it,

[T]he retributive principle has [God's] sanction, and indeed expresses the holiness, justice and goodness reflected in his law . . . Faith sees that God's demands remain what they were, and that God's law of retribution, which our conscience declares to be right, has not ceased to operate in his world, nor ever will; but that in our case the law has operated already, so that all our sins, past, present and even future, have been covered by Calvary. So our conscience is pacified by the knowledge that our sins have already been judged and punished, however strange the statement may sound, in the person and death of [Jesus].⁵⁴

More than that,

the legendary 'Rabbi' Duncan concentrated it all into a single unforgettable sentence, in a famous outburst to one of his classes: 'D'ye know

what Calvary was? what? what? what?' Then with tears on his face—'It was *damnation*; and he took it *lovingly*.' It is precisely this love that . . . penal substitution is all about, and that explains its power in the lives of those who acknowledge it.⁵⁵

So, in the classical view, even the atonement's vindication of God's justice brings the believer back to God's love. Thus, regarding justice as well as love, the classical view anchors the *moral trustworthiness* of God's sovereignty in our lives with its account of God's love and justice in the atonement.

The Open Position Regarding the God's Love in the Atonement

Sadly, this picture of God's love changes significantly and negatively in Boyd's open view, in no small part because his position must abandon the substitutionary model of atonement. The main problem is that Christ can no longer be understood as dying out of love for *you* and me, *as* specific, *concretely real persons*, let alone for our specific sins. This problem emerges from a combination of (a) what open theism says God's future knowledge consists in, and (b) what attitudes God can logically possibly have toward the content of that knowledge. The upshot is that when Christ went to the cross, even the *Father* could not have known what *specific, actual persons* in the future for whom He was dying, and hence that act could *not* have been performed for love of those recipients *as* real persons, nor for their *specific, actual sins*. That's not to say the Father didn't know of those *possible*-persons and those *possible*-sins among the vast range of possibilities His future knowledge comprehends. But as I'll show, that kind of knowledge can't support the kind of love or intention the classical position's definite foreknowledge can.

First, consider the restrictions on God's knowledge of the actual recipients of Christ's sacrifice. Who exists in the world is highly influenced by free, human decisions. Think back to Boyd's answer to Suzanne. God was only working with probabilities regarding Suzanne's marriage, from which she ended up with a child. Not only did God not know as a certainty the marriage would work, the situation contained a host of other key factors God couldn't know as more than probabilities. In the first place, God couldn't know for sure Suzanne would even accept His confirmation of the marriage or that her fiancé would either. Once they were married, God couldn't know that her husband would cheat or, once he had cheated, whether Suzanne and he would try to stay together or whether they would stick it out long enough to produce the child they did end up having. And whatever probability each of those events had would be conditional on the probabilities of the previous events' occurrences. From God's perspective before—and even during—the marriage, a long list of increasingly diminishing probabilities would have to be met before that child could be born. In short, even as recently prior to its birth as the onset of its parents' marriage, God could not have known that child would exist.

Consider what that kind of uncertainty implies over the length of time between Christ's death and now. We don't know what kind of probabilities God deals with regarding our free actions. Perhaps freedom makes opposing actions almost equally likely. Or perhaps freedom is consistent with a very high level of predictability, as long as it doesn't reach certainty. On that account, I'll spell out the situation in both ways. For ease of calculation, let's suppose that there's a new generation about every twenty years. With roughly 2,000 years since Christ's death, that makes one hundred generations separating the current one from His sacrifice. Also, to keep it simple, we'll consider only a free decision to marry (or at least, to have sex), leaving out all decisions within a marriage/intimate relationship (though, of course, they could have enormous impact, e.g., whether to have an additional child). Instead, we'll grant that once a marriage/intimate relationship happens, God can predict the offspring of it.

First, suppose free actions have not-much-more-than-50/50 likelihood; say, they might be as high as 60% likely for a given agent in a given situation. The first generation after Christ's death then would have a 60% chance of existing, from the Father's perspective at the time Christ went to the cross. The next generation would have 60% of that 60% chance of existing, and so on, for each subsequent generation. In this calculation, from God's perspective at the time of the crucifixion, the *particular members of the current generation would have only a $6.57 \times 10^{-21}\%$ chance of even existing*. Of course, the odds of our committing any of our specific actions would be staggeringly lower still. As Boyd admits, "The list of possibilities you face each day is voluminous. And with each decision from among all these possibilities, you open up a whole new set of possibilities."⁵⁶ Since even the first of those decisions is already conditional on the probability you exist, the multiplication of decision-possibilities would precipitously drop the probability of any later decisions.

But maybe the picture improves, if God has high probabilities regarding free actions. Sadly, it doesn't. To see why, let's suppose the high probabilities: say, God sees the outcomes of marriage (or sex) decisions with 95% likelihood. Again, with one hundred generations since Christ's sacrifice, the 95% of the second generation is conditioned on the 95% of the first generation, and so on. This way, from the Father's perspective at the time of the crucifixion, the *present generation would have a 0.592% chance of existing*. Again, the probabilities regarding any of our actions would be much, much lower. Of course, given the extreme over-simplification of the model, even if our free actions do individually have high probabilities, the actual chance of existence for the present generation—considered from God's perspective 2,000 years ago—would be orders of magnitude lower than the already miniscule 0.6% of the model.

Furthermore, there is strong reason to suppose Boyd cannot accept a high-probability model of free actions, anyway. If the probabilities regarding our free actions are high enough, like the 95% model just elucidated,

then Boyd's assurances to Suzanne, that God didn't know her husband would treat her so badly, begin to sound hollow and unconvincing. I doubt open theism could have provided much additional comfort to Suzanne, over the classical view, if rather than *knowing* her husband would abuse and abandon her, God had merely possessed a *thoroughly justified, virtually certain expectation* that he would do so. That would undermine the whole pastoral point of Boyd's commitment to open theism. It looks, then, like Boyd is stuck with the truly miniscule possibilities of the low-probability model of free actions.

The upshot is that, from God's projections at the time of the crucifixion, *our* existence would be beyond remote, as a possibility. As Boyd makes clear, "God perfectly anticipates all possible outcomes, [therefore] when the improbable occurs, it is by definition not what an omniscient God would expect to occur."⁵⁷ But this means that not only would God not know, at the time of Christ's sacrifice, that *you* and I would exist, He would have been virtually certain *you* and I would *not* exist. That doesn't even touch the probabilities of the sinful actions *you* and I commit. Because God forms His expectations of the future based on his infallible projections of the probabilities, then at the time of the crucifixion, God would *expect* that we particular persons would *not* exist. And any of *our* sinful actions would be even more firmly expected by God *not* to happen.

I want to be clear, here, that I don't mean God wouldn't see all these possibilities—wouldn't see possibility-clouds that represent *us* and the possible sets of our actions. I affirm with Boyd that God's infinite intellect would have no problem containing and assessing and making plans about those myriads of possible outcomes.⁵⁸ Boyd appeals to the well-known illustration of God as super grandmaster of chess:

God's perfect knowledge would allow him to anticipate *every* possible combination of moves, together with *every* possible response he might make to each of them, for *every* possible agent throughout history. And he would be able to do this from eternity past.⁵⁹

Agreed. What I do mean, though, is that the idea that Jesus died for *you* and me *as* concrete, real persons—that he died from a loving intention to atone for *your* actual sins and mine—becomes *nonsensical* in the open view of God's foreknowledge. As Packer points out, the substitutionary model requires that we "think of Christ's substitution for us on the cross as a definite, one-to-one relationship between him and each individual sinner." This seems scriptural, for Paul says, 'He loved *me* and gave himself for *me*.'⁶⁰ However, in Boyd's view, even the Father wouldn't have seen Jesus' death as being for *us*, because He could only have been expecting *us* not to exist. God could not have intended Jesus' sacrifice to be substitutionary atonement for *us* and our sins. In short, Boyd's open position must abandon the substitutionary model of Christ's atonement.

When I debated with Boyd at Whitworth University, I raised this objection to the open view. Boyd admitted the implication, calling it “a legitimate critique.”⁶¹ But to his credit, he had also anticipated the objection and had readied a reply, which he then further elucidated after the debate. Boyd explained that he indeed rejected the concept of substitutionary atonement. He opposed understanding the divine economy in a way that implied every bit of Christ’s sacrifice had to be accounted for in some particular sin or other. In fact, Boyd said, God doesn’t need to “take out” His wrath on anybody—either us or Jesus—in order to forgive; God forgives like the father in the parable of the prodigal son (though God does reserve judgment for those who ultimately reject His salvation). Instead, Boyd views Christ’s death and resurrection through the lens of *Christus Victor*. This model of the atonement holds that Jesus’ sacrifice and triumphant resurrection accomplished victory over sin and death and the devil. Prior to Jesus’ death on the cross, humanity was held in bondage from sin, under the accusation of the devil, resulting in death and the “second death” in hell. In dying and rising, Jesus broke those chains and sin’s and the devil’s power over humanity, freeing humanity to live and serve God.⁶² According to Boyd, Jesus wrote a “blank check” for humanity’s redemption; Jesus’ death was sufficient to cover all possible sinners and all possible sins.⁶³

Now, the classical view can accept *Christus Victor* alongside substitutionary atonement, as Packer points out.⁶⁴ I accept its valid additional insights into atonement, too. So I don’t oppose that Boyd appeals to *Christus Victor*, but only that he appeals to it instead of, rather than in addition to, substitutionary atonement. For as we shall now see, the open view utilizing *Christus Victor* model, alone, does not as strongly reassure believers of God’s love for *them*, as expressed in the atonement.

In Boyd’s picture, Jesus still dies for love of humanity, but it’s not the same kind or extent of love that we saw in the classical view. Jesus’ sacrifice starts to look like a grand gesture, an act of *noblesse oblige* by the God-king on behalf of the masses, both teeming (real) and faceless (possible). The love that leads Jesus to the cross is love for Humanity, in the abstract with a capital H. Unfortunately, this notion of God’s love doesn’t as fully address the question of how much he loves *you* and me as real individuals, sinful in concrete, ugly and nasty ways. As we’ve seen, part of the pastoral problem concerns believers’ struggle over whether God really loves *them*, or even whether He *can* love *them*, in all of their particular guilt and shame. If the cross is where God definitively proves His love for us, open theism’s characterization of atonement significantly undercuts how much individual believers can infer from that. As a theologian quoted by Packer put it, “I do not know . . . any interpretation of Christ’s death which enables us to regard it as a demonstration of love to [real, individual] sinners, if this . . . substitutionary character is denied.”⁶⁵

A profound insight from Moses Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas shows why Boyd’s open view cannot affirm the same kind of love in the atonement:

you can only love what you know. Both thinkers formulated this requirement in the context of analyzing our knowledge of God. Maimonides wrote,

One can only love God [as an outgrowth] of the knowledge with which he knows Him. The nature of one's love depends on the nature of one's knowledge! A small [amount of knowledge arouses] a lesser love. A greater amount of knowledge arouses a greater love.⁶⁶

Or, as the famous Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides puts it, "A person can only love according to the degree that he knows the object of his love."⁶⁷ Aquinas echoed that, writing, "No one tends with desire and zeal toward something that is not already known to him."⁶⁸ The affection and devotion and trust of love actually "miss" their intended object, if that object is not adequately known, or if it is not known as it really is. For illustration, suppose someone has a crush on a famous movie star, due to the perception of the star in his films and the press. The fan is devoted to an *image* that's actually quite different from the star. If she managed to meet the star, she might well find his real personality distasteful. She might think she's in love with the star, but of course she really isn't. In fact, unless she comes to genuinely know him, she *can't* love *him*—the real him.⁶⁹ More than that, as Aquinas wrote, knowing something fully and completely—the way God, at least, knows things—is "the understanding of the very substance of that being," grasping its essence exactly as it is.⁷⁰ Further, Aquinas pointed out that knowledge can only attain "such certitude in each thing as the nature of that thing allows."⁷¹ It's like trying to determine what a Jackson Pollack painting expresses; both the canvas and the artist's mind were deliberately undefined, so no true expression can be identified.

The open view's problem is that from the temporal perspective of the crucifixion *you* and I resembled the Pollack painting in God's foreknowledge. What is it that God then knew of *us*? God could not have known *you* and me as real, distinct, determinate persons. Yes, He recognized possible lines of events within a cloud of possibilities—the lines that turned out/are turning out/may turn out to be *your* life and mine. He knew those possibilities exactly in their full range. But He also knew them exactly *as* only that, *abstract possibilities*, as a *cloud*—and more, as a possibility-cloud *He expected not to occur*, as we saw above. Given the ontological nature of a freely-enacted future as simply a cloud of possibilities, Boyd's open position must say that it was logically impossible for the subject matter of God's foreknowledge of *us* to have any more definiteness than that cloud. But possibility-clouds are not persons. The open view cannot include that God could know *you* or me as *persons* in the work of atonement when Jesus went to the cross. There simply weren't such subjects then available for God to know, regarding *you* and me.

At this point, Boyd might object that God's intellect could certainly group together clusters of possibilities and recognize each cluster as a possible life of

a possible person—one way that possible-person's life might go, and another way, and so on. So the Father, from the crucifixion, could know each possible life-permutation of each possible person and recognize that the atonement could be for *them*, in each of their specifics. That's true; God could do that. But it doesn't avoid the central problem: once the possibilities have been intellectually clustered, each of those specific, possible persons does not thereby become a concrete, real person to be loved *as a person*. These objects of God's knowledge, and thus of His love, remain mere possibility-clusters even in His understanding because the subject matter of that knowledge and love admits of no more ontological definition than that.

Further, given that each of those possibility-clusters is expected by God *not* to become actual, a point from Aquinas' action theory seems relevant here. In analyzing intentional action, Aquinas described a *velleity*, or an incomplete willing. In the interaction between reason and will that produces action, reason identifies things as good, and will inclines toward those goods with love that can motivate action concerning them. However, when reason recognizes something as good but also recognizes that it can't be attained by any action the will could generate, a *velleity* occurs. The will can't love the object in the same action-generating way, but only in a wistful, "that would have been nice" way.⁷² Aquinas said a *velleity* is a "feeble" thing that doesn't amount to a full intention to act.⁷³ For example, being able to fly like Superman would be cool, but I'm not motivated to try to do so (at least, not as an adult) because I know it's impossible. I just think, "That would have been sweet," and move on. My will isn't engaged like it is for my upcoming family trip to see my brother's new baby, for which my wife and I are actively preparing.

Here's the relevance: Not only does God, at the crucifixion, see the possible-person possibility-clusters that are *you* and me as unlikely in the extreme to occur, He also recognizes them as *beyond His ability to make actual*, given His commitment to human freedom. Of course, God could simply create *you* and me, whenever or wherever He desired. But if, as Boyd's open position maintains, God's commitment to human freedom means He will only create the future human beings that result from future, free decisions of other humans, then *every* future human being is something beyond God's will's power. And the further in the future that possible person is, the more free, human decisions stand in the way of God's ability to create that person. As a result, it strongly appears God's will to love *us*, as real, concrete persons, would—from His perspective at the crucifixion—be limited to a *velleity*. Such a love would not lead to action about or for *us*.

Admittedly, Aquinas's analysis of human, intentional action must have significant dis-analogies to God's actions. But is the point about *velleities* one of them? Certainly, it would be in the classical view. That understanding of God's foreknowledge and sovereignty makes each person in history something that God's will has ordained from the beginning. However, given open theism's account of God's actions, I don't see good reason to think *velleities* are dis-analogous in that view. Boyd's position already concedes that

God can look with regret on decisions He's made, based on free, human responses to them. What then would prevent God from looking wistfully at decisions He futilely wishes he could make, but cannot—or at least cannot expect to—given the free, human actions standing in their way? Nothing that I see.

To sum up these points: From His perspective at the time of the crucifixion, God could not love *you* or me *as* persons. And what love He could direct toward *us* possibility-clouds of possible persons would be in the manner of a *velleity*, stopped short of prompting action on *our* behalf. As Maimonides and Aquinas saw, love requires knowledge of its object, and the manner or degree to which something can be loved by an agent is conditional on the manner or degree to which the object is known. That manner of knowledge is itself conditional on the manner in which the subject of knowledge exists, on the definiteness of the subject matter. Further, even when an object is known, the kind of love that can be directed to it is conditional on whether the loving agent sees the object as something that the agent can obtain or realize. If the agent doesn't possess a way to do so, the love is truncated to a *velleity* that will not generate action regarding the object. Thus, to God, at the crucifixion, *you* and I weren't the sort of objects even able to be known *as* concrete, real persons—we didn't exist in the needed ontological category. Because of that, God could not love *us* in the manner or degree of love for persons but only in the manner or degree of loving possibility-clouds expected not to be realized. Jesus' sacrifice could not have been successfully motivated by such a love; Jesus could not have died *for*—out of love for, and on behalf of—*you* or me, as concrete, real persons. The love that Jesus could die for is once again not for *us*, but for capital-H, abstract Humanity.

But perhaps Boyd has a rebuttal here. As we've seen, Boyd stresses the vast power of God's mind. He writes, for example, that God is never caught flatfooted or unprepared in the midst of the infinitude of possibilities.⁷⁴ Boyd even says the open view presents God as wiser and more capable than the classical view does because, here, God has foreknowledge of, and plans for, myriads of possibilities, rather than one plan for one future.⁷⁵ Boyd might bolster his exaltation of God's mind by proposing that God's intellectual capabilities include "upscaling" beyond the source material. That is, many high-definition TVs and Blu-Ray players have been marketed as upscaling standard-definition sources, like DVDs, to high-definition resolution. They're supposed to show a clearer picture than the source video actually contains. Whether that's just false hype or not about TVs, maybe God's mind can do that. Even though *we* could only be probability clouds in God's foreknowledge at the crucifixion, perhaps God could "see" us as more than that, upscaling those clouds into the "resolution" of real, concrete persons. Somehow, to God's mind *we* could become more than just intellectually-grouped probability-lines and gain a quasi-reality as persons to Him. Those upscaled "persons" could then be known, and thereby loved and died for *as* persons. With this appeal to God's intellectual power, Boyd could try to

reassure *us* that Christ had indeed died for *us*; perhaps the substitutionary model might even be re-appropriated for open theism.

However, we have two strong reasons to believe Boyd cannot support such a defense. First, even if God knew and loved us as upscaled “persons,” that wouldn’t solve the *velleity* problem limiting the action-prompting efficacy of God’s love for *us*. We would still be “persons” beyond God’s expectation of His will’s ability to realize. We would remain the kind of objects for which God’s will could not engage action, the sort of thing Christ could not die *for*. Of course, Boyd could push forward and maintain God’s will can upscale too, turning *velleities* into full, action-producing love. Yet expanding the upscaling merely increases the force of the second reason: *divine intellectual-upscaling was exactly the method Luis de Molina appealed to in justifying middle knowledge and definite “would do” counterfactuals of freedom*.

That is, future, free possible actions are described in counterfactuals of freedom. For example, “If Tanya were offered a gift certificate to Red Lobster in exchange for singing in a public place, she would freely sing to get the certificate.” As we’ve seen, according to open theism, the above counterfactual would be necessarily false. There can only be “might do” counterfactuals of freedom, not “would do” counterfactuals.⁷⁶ However, Molina, the original theorist of middle knowledge and a champion of “would do” counterfactuals of freedom, justified his position by appeal to upscaling. He admitted that future free actions, in themselves, might be less than definite objects of knowledge. However, he maintained that because God knew them in in His own perfect nature, rather than in themselves, God possessed a “super-comprehension” of them that resolved them into grounds for definite counterfactuals of freedom.⁷⁷ Molina’s view aimed at reconciling God’s definite foreknowledge and our libertarian freedom, and it came to be adopted by contemporary defenders—like Alvin Plantinga, Tom Flint, and William Lane Craig—of Reformed, Catholic, and other versions of the classical view. In short, if Boyd were to appeal to the supercomprehension of upscaling in the divine intellect, he would play directly into Molinism’s hands. Having admitted that God’s mind could super-resolve objects of knowledge—including future, possible persons and their possible, free actions—unresolved in themselves, Boyd would no longer have reason to deny that God’s foreknowledge of those objects could resolve to definite “would do” counterfactuals of freedom. As a result, Boyd must avoid the upscaling defense of his open view. Therefore, we’re still left with the conclusion that *Jesus could not die for love of you or me as persons*, nor could the Father allow Jesus’ death for such a love. It might be worth taking a moment to let that sink in.

Consider this question: “Is knowledge of and love for *me*, as a person, real and concrete with *these* sinful actions, part of the reason—and perhaps in itself a *sufficient* reason—why Jesus went to the cross?” On the classical view, the answer is *yes*. On the open view, however, the answer is *no*. The former position tells the believer something crucial about how much and to what lengths God loves her or him, specifically. The latter doesn’t. For a struggling

believer or one struggling to believe, that difference matters deeply. Imagine Jeffrey Dahmer, the cannibalistic serial killer, who is reported to have become a Christian in prison. How much would it have mattered to him to know that God had known *him as a real person*—exactly who he would be and what he would do—and still had intended Jesus’ sacrifice to count specifically *for him*? Or conversely, what difference would it have made, if he had been told Jesus had offered blanket coverage that he could slip under even though God hadn’t expected the coverage to be used in that specific way. Would Dahmer have been as sure of God’s love for *him*, as the atonement revealed it?

At this point, Boyd might object that even though God didn’t expect Dahmer—or Hitler or *you* or me—to exist, He still knew that *we* might. More than that, given the prevalence and depravity of human choices in the possibility-clouds of God’s foreknowledge, God might well have expected that many morally atrocious human choices would occur. That, is maybe God didn’t expect Hitler but knew *some* anti-Semitic genocide was likely; maybe He didn’t expect Dahmer but knew *some* cannibalistic serial killer would probably show up. In Boyd’s view, God, knowing all those possibilities could say, “I see how bad humanity could get, and I write this blank check, anyway. It might end up atoning for a genocide or cannibalistic serial killer, but I’m willing to do that.” Boyd could then offer comfort to Dahmer that even if God hadn’t meant the atonement for *him*, as a concrete, real person, God had still meant the atonement to count for someone *like* him, maybe just as bad or even worse.

True enough. But this answer ends up emphasizing the problem raised earlier: it’s clear, here, that Jesus died for Everyone (that capital-E abstract group of possibilities) and for no one (specific, real persons with specific, real sins). This picture of atonement leaves existing, individual believers and doubters wondering how much love for *them* was expressed in the cross. And if, as argued in the previous section, we principally know the depths of God’s love in the action of Christ on the cross, then Boyd’s position leaves *us* unsure of what *we* can take from that.

It’s not that God doesn’t love *us*, now that *we’re* here, on the open view; of course He does. But would God go to those lengths of the cross for *us*, in spite of *our* sins? Open theism’s answer is, “*Very probably.*” That’s not a joke; that’s the best reassurance open theism can offer. For as Boyd makes clear in numerous places, the whole point of open theism is that the possible actions of freedom can never be known as anything more than probabilities.⁷⁸ Only “might do” counterfactuals of freedom can be true, never “would do.” *But that applies to God’s actions, too.* God is obviously free. God loves, and—as we saw Boyd point out, above—the ability to love is *logically* dependent on being free. That means in the open view, God’s possible, free actions can only be described with “might” counterfactuals. Granted, the probabilities of God’s possible free actions may well be very high. But saying that it’s “really, highly probable” that Jesus would have died for *you* isn’t at all the same thing as saying, “Jesus *would* have died for *you*,” let alone, “Jesus *did* die for *you*.”

In the classical view, God at the cross concretely demonstrated the length of His love for *us*, specifically. In the open view, God's claim to that extent of love starts to sound like a boast He might not back up. In fact, since that expression of love would be a free action, the open view has to admit *there is a genuine chance—no matter how small—that God wouldn't die for you or me*.

Moreover, recall that Boyd thinks God has literally, rather than merely anthropomorphically, regretted loving decisions He's made based on how our responses to them turned out—even though He clearly foresaw all the possibilities from those decisions from the start. That is, recognizing how badly it might turn out didn't stop God from feeling regret over His actions when the presumably less probable possibilities of human badness were realized. It happened with making Saul king, recommending Suzanne's husband, and even with the creation of humanity just before the flood.⁷⁹ But like Suzanne's ex-husband, *you* may have acted improbably sometimes so that *your* exact action-set would not be the most probable in God's forecast, even given *your* unlikely existence. On that account, God, having covered you under the blank check in Christ but now seeing how you've actually turned out, *might regret His decision on your behalf*. God might now see *you* and regret having bothered in *your* case. *He might literally wish He could take back His offer*. Thus Boyd's view has to accept that God might now or in the future *regret atoning for us on the cross*, even though God did foresee all the possible persons and possible sins. Again, imagine Jeffrey Dahmer—or anyone cognizant of the gravity of their own sin—hearing the offer of grace under those terms. How sure could he, or any of *us*, be of the true extent of God's love for him? In the open view, the assurance of God's love, as expressed in Jesus' atoning sacrifice, is nowhere near as strong as what the classical view describes. Once again, if the atonement is where we know the extent and constancy of God's love, Boyd's open view critically undercuts that assurance of love for *us*.

Boyd tries to head off this problem by explicitly saying that, unlike us, God does *not* have to *choose* to love; He just loves as part of His necessary and perfect character.⁸⁰ Unfortunately, this defense cannot be taken seriously because it is *incoherent* with Boyd's larger claim that *love must, by logical necessity, be chosen*.⁸¹ The claim about love and choice drives the whole rationale for freedom, necessitates the open future, and thereby justifies the risk of evil. But given that this claim must be kept, the claim about God not having to choose to love must be jettisoned. Unless Boyd means that God can do logically impossible things, in which case, all bets are off. For then, God could create *us* as able to love without free choice, even though that's logically impossible, or He could exactly foreknow all our un-foreknowable free actions, and so on. Boyd is forced back to the position that God, by logical necessity of the nature of love, must *choose* to love *us*, and that He *might* have chosen not to love *us* to the extent of dying for *us* on the cross.

Before I end, let me make a brief remark about what the open view of the atonement implies for God's justice. Again, there's a larger argument, here

that would go beyond the focus of this work. Nevertheless, notice that in the *Christus Victor* approach which Boyd proposes as consistent with open theism, Jesus' sacrifice is more like a rescue mission than a satisfaction of God's justice. The devil is our accuser, not God, and Jesus saves humanity from the devil's power. God doesn't need to exact penalties before He forgives, he simply forgives, as the father did in the parable of the prodigal son.⁸² But if this is all that's going on, without the substitutionary aspect, *Christus Victor* seems to diminish God's concern for justice. Boyd claims open theism "renders intelligible God's radical opposition to all evil," because it "allows us to say consistently in unequivocal terms that the ultimate source for all evil is found in the will of free agents rather than in God."⁸³ However, I argue that even if the open view distances God from accusations of responsibility for evil (which is questionable, but that's another argument), that "radical opposition" to evil is *not* visible in open theism's account of atonement. Jesus writes a blank check of atonement to break sin's power, with God not needing to know specifics of what it's for. God doesn't seem concerned about the particular, human evils that have occurred or will occur. God simply forgives whatever may come and (probably) would have forgiven without any satisfaction of justice anyway. Remember, the father neither demands any redress from the prodigal son, nor receives any beyond the son's confession.⁸⁴ It seems the devil is more concerned about punishing wrongs than God is. More than that, if the retributive principle is *not* accepted by God (contrary to Packer's assertion), but only by the devil, it doesn't seem to make any sense for God to allow Jesus' death to satisfy a principle that's not part of His own moral framework. That is, why would the Father send Jesus to die for something He didn't approve of, for a mistaken principle asserted by an evil creature? The desire that evil should be punished turns out to be literally Satanic and not something that Father would cater to by sacrificing Jesus to it. I know this picture is oversimplified, but the basics seem correct. And if they are, then I submit that *open theism's account of the atonement weakens the believer's assurance of God's concern for justice.*

Conclusion

Greg Boyd believes that open theism, among other advantages he claims for it, can much better address the pastoral problem of evil in its doubts about God's *moral* trustworthiness as sovereign. Having now surveyed its account, we see that open theism seriously fails this test. Open theism's treatment of the atonement makes the pastoral problem of evil more difficult by lessening the questioners' assurance of the moral trustworthiness of God's sovereignty in their lives. We've seen indications that God's concern for justice is less present in the open view because its model of the atonement does not include satisfying God's justice over specific wrongs done. More centrally for the current argument, we've seen that while Jesus' atoning sacrifice is supposed to demonstrate God's love for *us*, from the perspective of the

specific, sinful individuals that *we* are, this demonstration is significantly weaker in open theism. It is no longer true—as it was in the classical view of foreknowledge—that Jesus went to the cross out of God's love for *us* and to specifically pay the price for and blot out *our* sins. Instead, Jesus wrote a blank check for all of Humanity, loved in its abstract entirety. And because there are no certainties about free actions like expressions of love, Jesus cannot even assure us that He *definitely would* go (or definitely would have gone) to the cross for *us*. He truly might *not* (or might not have done so), even if that possibility is remote. And further, having offered all humans redemption in the abstract, God, seeing *us* actually, might regret that and wish to take it back with regard to *our* cases. Even if we grant Boyd's claim, that open theism helps us trust God's love because He's not responsible for bad things that happen to us, open theism's *overall* effect on God's moral trustworthiness is negative because of its account of atonement, the central demonstration of God's love. For all these reasons, open theism has the opposite effect of what Boyd proposes: rather than shoring up the assurance of God's love in our individual lives—and thereby of the moral trustworthiness of God's rule in the events of those lives—open theism's account of the atonement undermines that assurance. Greg Boyd's open theism thus fails his self-appointed test regarding the pastoral problem of evil.

Notes

1. Gregory A. Boyd and Keith D. Wyma, *Open Theism vs. Divine Foreknowledge*, Discussion-debate at Whitworth University, 22 October 2008. URL = www.whitworth.edu/podcast/archive.aspx, accessed 2 January 2013; Cf. Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 89–90.
2. Boyd and Wyma, *Open Theism vs. Divine Foreknowledge*.
3. Job 6:13, 7:20, 12:4–5 [NASB].
4. Ps. 22:1.
5. Ps. 73:2–3.
6. Ps. 88 vv.3,7,13,14.
7. Thomas Crisp and Tim O'Connor, *The Existential Problem of Evil and The Brothers Karamazov*, online discussion for Biola University, 11 September 2012. URL = <http://cct.biola.edu/resources/the-existential-problem-of-evil-and-the-brothers-karamazov/>, accessed 4 June 2015; Peter van Inwagen, *The Problem of Evil* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5.
8. van Inwagen, *Problem of Evil*, 5.
9. Ibid. See also Douglas K. Blount, *The Problem of Evil and Suffering*, Lecture Delivered at Bethel Bible. URL = www.bethelbible.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Problem-of-Evil-for-Bethel-Bible.pdf, accessed 4 June 2015.
10. van Inwagen, *Problem of Evil*, 11.
11. Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1986), 6.
12. Keith D. Wyma, "Innocent Sinfulness, Guilty Sin: Original Sin and Divine Justice," in *A Reader in Contemporary Philosophical Theology*, ed. Oliver Crisp (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009), 278–292.
13. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 87, 92.
14. Ibid., 93.

15. Ibid., 99.
16. Ibid., 45.
17. Ibid., 103.
18. Ibid., 98.
19. Ibid., 103.
20. Ibid., 103–104.
21. Ibid., 105.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 58, emphasis original, and 154.
24. Ibid., 99, emphasis added.
25. Ibid., 73, 135.
26. Ibid., 99.
27. Ibid., 154.
28. Ibid., 46.
29. Ibid., 99. Boyd's contention, here, seems misguided (as my colleague, Nathan King, pointed out to me). Some versions of the problem of evil seem driven by exactly the opposite conclusion: that evils occur for which there is no reason. For example, see William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1979): 335–341. It won't be explored in this paper, but Boyd's open position, which denies God has reasons for specific evils, may lead him right into Rowe's arms.
30. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 58.
31. Ibid., 58, 102.
32. Ibid., 98.
33. Ibid., 105–106.
34. Ibid., 59–61.
35. Ibid., 55–56, 105.
36. Ibid., 61.
37. Ibid., 106.
38. Ibid., 135.
39. Ibid., 134.
40. Ibid., 134–135.
41. Ibid., 73, emphasis in original.
42. Ibid., 135.
43. Ibid., 153, emphasis in original.
44. John 3:16, I John 4:9–10, etc.
45. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (New York, NY: Scribner's, 1957), 536, 548, 556–557.
46. I realize this is merely the barest sketch of an enormous theological and moral point bound up with two millennia of Christian thinking. But I don't believe I'm proposing anything theologically controversial, here, so I hope the sketch will suffice for continuing to the point against open theism.
47. On this point I diverge from the traditional Reformed view: I oppose limited atonement. My own Reformed position is closer to Barth's on this matter.
48. From here on out, when I underline 'you,' I mean to address that specific, real individual who is the reader; "you, most particularly, you," to borrow a phrase from Rudyard Kipling.
49. I realize that to some the connection between the classical view and substitutionary atonement may appear only to be another problem for the classical view, since this model of atonement has come under attack in recent times. However, many of those attacks—including that the model is un-biblical or a modern invention, or that it relies too much on a legal structure that doesn't fit the situation, or that it's morally wrong of God to require the payment of death, and

- so on—can be strongly rebutted. Obviously, that defense isn't my task here, but for two examples of strong defenses, I refer the reader to J.I. Packer, *What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution*, The Tyndale Biblical Theology Lecture, 1973. URL = www.the-highway.com/cross_Packer.html, accessed 27 June 2016; and James E. Bradley, *Historical Reflections on Substitutionary Atonement*, Fuller Studio, 2012. URL = <http://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/historical-reflections-on-substitutionary-atonement/>, accessed 27 June 2016.
50. Martin Luther, *Galatians*, trans. Philip Saville Watson (London: J. Clarke, 1953), 269–271. Quoted in Packer, *What Did the Cross Achieve?*
51. Packer, *What Did the Cross Achieve?*
52. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians*, 1535, 277, 283–284. Quoted in Bradley, *Historical Reflections on Substitutionary Atonement*.
53. Gen. 2:16–17; Is. 53:12; Rom. 4:25, 6:10, 6:23, 7:11, etc.
54. Packer, *What Did the Cross Achieve?*
55. *Ibid.*
56. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 127.
57. Gregory A. Boyd, “The Open Theism View” and “Responses,” in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, eds. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 146.
58. *Ibid.*, 146; Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 127–128.
59. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 127, emphasis in original.
60. Packer, *What Did the Cross Achieve?* emphasis in original.
61. Boyd and Wyma, *Open Theism vs. Divine Foreknowledge*.
62. For the full account of this model and argument in its favor, see Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor* (Collier: Wise Path Books, 1931).
63. Boyd and Wyma, *Open Theism vs. Divine Foreknowledge*; and Gregory A. Boyd, *Interview Over Dinner*, Whitworth University, 22 October 2008.
64. Packer, *What Did the Cross Achieve?*, section on substitution.
65. James Denney, *The Death of Christ* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), 126, quoted in Packer, *What Did the Cross Achieve?*
66. Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Teshuvah 10*, trans. Elijah Touger. URL = www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/911914/jewish/Teshuvah-Chapter-Ten.htm, accessed 21 July 2015.
67. Moses Maimonides, *Laws of Teshuva 10: 6*. URL = www.aish.com.
68. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, book 1, chapter 5.
69. Maimonides used this insight to argue the futility of idolatrous worship: focused on necessarily faulty understandings of God tied to creaturely objects, idolaters don't and can't love (the real) God. Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Dover, 1956), part 1, chapter 56.
70. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, book 1, chapter 3.
71. *Ibid.*
72. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q.21, a.4, resp.; App.1, a.1, a.2, resp. 2.
73. Thomas Aquinas, *Epistolam ad Romanos*, book 7, lecture 3.
74. Boyd, “The Open View,” 146.
75. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 127.
76. Boyd, “The Open View,” 146.
77. For a complete account of supercomprehension in Molina's view, see Luis De Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge: Part IV of the “Concordia”*, trans. Alfred Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); and Kirk R. MacGregor, *Luis de Molina: The Life and Theology of the Founder of Middle Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015).
78. Boyd, “The Open View,” 145–146; and Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 16, 120.

79. Gen. 6:5–7.

80. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 136–137.

81. *Ibid.*, 135ff.

82. Boyd and Wyma, *Open Theism vs. Divine Foreknowledge*.

83. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 102–103.

84. Luke 15:11–32.

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